Ancient Classics for English Readers

EDITED BY THE

REV. W. LUCAS COLLINS, M.A.

ARISTOPHANES

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HOMER: THE ODYSSEY, ... By the Same.
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CÆSAR, ... By Anthony Trollope.
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ARISTOPHANES

BY THE

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'ETONIANA,' 'THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS,' ETC.

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CONTENTS.

		PAGE
CHAP. I.	INTRODUCTION, ...	1
" II.	THE KNIGHTS, ...	
" III.	COMEDIES OF THE WAR: THE ACHARNIANS. THE PEACE.—LYSISTRATA, . . .	
" IV.	THE CLOUDS, ...	75
" V.	THE WASPS, ...	101
" VI.	THE BIRDS, ...	112
" VII.	THE FROGS, ...	125
" VIII.	THE WOMEN'S FESTIVAL.—THE ECCLESIAZUSÆ,	139
" IX.	PLUTUS, ...	154

NOTE.

In 'The Knights,' 'The Acharnians,' 'The Birds,' and 'The Frogs,' most of the translated extracts are taken, by permission, from the admirable version of those comedies by the late Mr Hookham Frere, and are marked (F.) For all translations not so marked the present writer is responsible.

ARISTOPHANES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

It has been observed already,* in speaking of these "ancient" classical authors, that some of them, in their tone and spirit, have much more in common with modern literature than with their great predecessors who wrote in the same language, and whose volumes stand ranged upon the same shelves. This may be remarked with especial truth of these Comedies of Aristophanes. A national comedy which has any pretension at all to literary merit—which is anything more than mere coarse buffoonery—must, in its very nature, be of later growth than epic or lyric poetry, tragedy, or historic narrative. It assumes a fuller intellectual life, a higher civilisation, and a keener taste in the people who demand it and appreciate it. And Athenian comedy, as we have it repre-

* Introd. to 'Cicero' (A. C.)

sented in the plays of Aristophanes, implies all these in a very high degree on the part of the audience to whom it was presented. It flourished in those glorious days of Athens which not long preceded her political decline,—when the faculties of her citizens were strung to full pitch, when there was much wealth and much leisure, when the arts were highly cultivated and education widely spread, and the refinements and the vices which follow such a state of things presented an ample field for the play of wit and fancy, the *badinage* of the humorist, or the more trenchant weapons of satire.

But although this Athenian comedy is, in one sense, so very modern in its spirit, we must not place it in comparison with that which we call comedy now. It was something quite different from that form of drama which, with its elaborate and artistic plot, its lively incidents, and brilliant dialogue, has taken possession under the same name of the modern stage. It is difficult to compare it to any one form of modern literature, dramatic or other. It perhaps most resembled what we now call burlesque; but it had also very much in it of broad farce and comic opera, and something also (in the hits at the fashions and follies of the day with which it abounded) of the modern pantomime. But it was something more, and more important to the Athenian public, than any or all of these could have been. Almost always more or less political, and sometimes intensely personal, and always with some purpose more or less important underlying its wildest vagaries and coarsest buffooneries, it

supplied the place of the political journal, the literary review, the popular caricature, and the party pamphlet, of our own times. It combined the attractions and the influence of all these; for its grotesque masks and elaborate "spectacle" addressed the eye as strongly as the author's keenest witticisms did the ear of his audience. Some weak resemblance of it might have been found, in modern times, in that curious outdoor drama, the Policinella of the Neapolitans: something of the same wild buffoonery overlying the same caustic satire on the prominent events and persons of the day, and even something of the same popular influence.* The comic dramatist who produced his annual budget of lampoon and parody has also been compared, not inaptly, to the "Terræ Filius" of our universities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; that curious shadow of the old pagan saturnalia, when once in the year some clever and reckless graduate claimed prescriptive right to launch the shafts of his wit against proctors, doctors, heads of houses, and dignities in general—too often without much more regard to decency than his Athenian prototype. The Paris 'Charivari' and the London 'Punch,' in their best days, had perhaps more of the tone of Aristophanes about them than any other modern literary production; for Rabelais, who resembled the Athenian dramatist

* "Here, in his native tongue and among his own countrymen, Punch is a person of real power: he dresses up and retails all the drolleries of the day; he is the channel and sometimes the source of the passing opinions; he could gain a mob, or keep the whole kingdom in good humour."—Forsyth's Italy, ii. 35.

in many of his worst characteristics as well as his best, can scarcely be called modern, and has few readers. The 'Age' and the 'Satirist' newspapers, to those who remember them during their brief day of existence, may well represent Athenian comedy in its worst and most repulsive features—its scurrilous personalities and disregard of decency.

It may be remembered by the readers of these volumes that the dramatic representations at Athens took place only at the Dionysia, or Great Festivals of Bacchus, which were held three times a-year, and that each play was brought out by its author in competition for the prize of tragedy or comedy which was then awarded to the successful exhibitors by the public voice, and which was the object of intense ambition.* This will in some degree account for the character of Attic comedy. It was an appeal to the audience,—not only to their appreciation of wit and humour, but also to their sympathies, social and political, their passions, and their prejudices. Therefore it was so often bitterly personal and so hotly political. The public demand was always for something "sensational" in these respects, and the authors took care to comply with it. And therefore, also, we find introduced so frequently confidential appeals to the audience themselves, not only in those addresses (called the *parabasis*) in which the author is allowed to speak in his own proper person through the mouth of the Chorus, but also on the part of the individual characters during the action of the play. They enlist the spectators

* See 'Æschylus' (A. C.), chap. i.

themselves among the *dramatis personæ*,—not a very artistic proceeding, but no doubt popular and very tempting. It has been adopted by modern dramatists, even by so high an authority as Molière,* and notoriously by farce-writers of more recent date.

But there could be no greater mistake than to suppose that the audience before whom these plays of Aristophanes were represented were impressible only by these lower influences. It has just been said that education at Athens was widely spread. Readers, indeed, might not be many, when books were necessarily so few; but the education which was received by the masses through their constant attendance at the theatre, the public deliberative assembly, and the law-courts, was quite as effective in sharpening their intelligence and their memory. Fully to realise to ourselves what Greek intellect was in the bright days of Athens, and to understand how well that city deserved her claim to be the intellectual "eye of Greece," we should not appeal to the works of her great poets, her historians, or her orators, which may be assumed (though scarcely in the case of the tragedians) to have depended for their due appreciation upon the finer tastes of the few: we must turn to these comedies, addressed directly to an audience in which, although those finer tastes were not unrepre-

* The appeal which Harpagon makes to the audience to help him to discover the thief who has stolen his money ('L'Avare,' act iv. sc. 7) is an exact parallel with that of the two slaves in 'The Knights' (see p. 18), and again in 'The Wasps,' when they come forward and consult them confidentially in their difficulties.

sented, the verdict of what we should call the "masses" was essential to the author's success. There is abundant evidence in these pieces—it is impressed upon the reader disagreeably in every one of them—that, willingly or unwillingly, the writer pandered to the vulgar taste, and degraded his Muse to the level of the streets in order to catch this popular favour; though not without occasional protests in his own defence against such perversion of his art—protests which we must fear were only half sincere. But there is evidence quite as conclusive that the intellectual calibre, and even the literary taste, of this audience was of a far higher character than that of the modern pit and gallery. The dramatist not only assumes on their behalf a familiarity with all the best scenes and points in the dramas of the great tragedians—which, in the case of such inveterate play-goers as the Athenians were, is not so very surprising—and an acquaintance with the political questions and the public celebrities of the day which possibly might be found, in this age when every man is becoming a politician, amongst a Paris or a London theatrical auditory; but he also expects to find, and evidently did find, an acquaintance with, and an appreciation of, poetry generally, a comprehension of at least the salient points of different systems of philosophy, and an ability to seize at once and appropriate all the finer points of allusion, of parody, and of satire. Aristophanes is quite aware of the weaknesses and the wilfulness of this many-headed multitude, whom he satirises so unsparingly to their faces; but he had

good right to say of them, as he does in his 'Knights,' that they were an audience with whom he might make sure at least of being understood,—"For our friends here are sharp enough." *

It is to be regretted that the Comedies of Aristophanes are now less read at our universities than they were some years ago. If one great object of the study of the classics is to gain an accurate acquaintance with one of the most brilliant and interesting epochs in the history of the world, no pages will supply a more important contribution to this knowledge than those of the great Athenian humorist. He lays the flesh and blood, the features and the colouring, upon the skeleton which the historian gives us. His portraits of political and historical celebrities must of course be accepted with caution, as the works of a professional caricaturist; but, like all good caricatures, they preserve some striking characteristics of the men which find no place in their historical portraits, and they let us know what was said and thought of them by irreverent contemporaries. It is in these comedies that we have the Athenians at home; and although modern writers of Athenian history have laid them largely under contribution in the way of reference and illustration, nothing will fill in the outline of the Athens of Cleon and Alcibiades and Socrates so vividly as the careful study of one of these remarkable dramas in the Greek original. One is inclined to place more faith than is usually due to anecdotes of the kind in that which is told of Plato, that when the elder Dionysius, tyrant of

* The Knights, l. 233.

Syracuse, wrote to him to request information as to the state of things at Athens, the philosopher sent him a copy of Aristophanes's 'Clouds,' as the best and most trustworthy picture of that marvellous republic.

Of the writers of the "Old" Athenian comedy (so termed to distinguished it from the "New," which was of a different character, and more like our own), Aristophanes is the only one whose works have come down to us. He had some elder contemporaries who were formidable and often successful rivals with him in the popular favour, but of their plays nothing now remains but a few titles and fragments of plots preserved by other writers. Of one of them, Cratinus, who died a few years after Aristophanes began to write for the stage, the younger author makes some not unkindly mention more than once, though he had been beaten by him somewhat unexpectedly upon the old man's last appearance, after some interval of silence, in the dramatic arena. It is curious to learn that in this his last production the veteran satirist found a subject in himself. The critics and the public had accused him (not unjustly, if we may trust Aristophanes here) of having grown too fond of wine, and of dulling his faculties by this indulgence. His reply was this comedy, which he called 'The Bottle.' He himself was the hero of the piece, and was represented as having deserted his lawful wife, the Comic Muse, for the charms of this new mistress. But in the catastrophe he was reformed and reconciled to the worthier lady; and the theatrical critics—perhaps out of sympathy with their old favourite—awarded him the first

prize, though Aristophanes had brought forward in the competition of that year what he esteemed one of his masterpieces.*

The extreme licence of personal attack which was accorded by general consent to the writers of comedy, so that any man whose character and habits were at all before the public might find himself at any moment held up to popular ridicule upon the stage, will be the subject of remark hereafter. It must have been very unpleasant and embarrassing, one must suppose, to the individuals thus marked out; but the sacredness of private life and character was something unknown to an Athenian, and he would not be nearly so sensitive on these points as ourselves. The very fact that this licence was allowed to exist so long is some proof that it was on the whole not unfairly exercised. The satiric writer must have felt that his popularity depended upon his aiming his blows only where the popular feeling held them to be well deserved; and there are some follies and vices which this kind of castigation can best reach, and cases of public shamelessness or corruption which, under a lax code of morality, can only be fitly punished by public ridicule. When, towards the close of the great struggle between Athens and Sparta, the executive powers of the State had been usurped by the oligarchy of the "Four Hundred," a law was passed to prohibit, under strong penalties, the introduction of real persons into these satiric dramas: but the check thus put to the right of popular criticism upon public men and measures was

* The Clouds.

only a token of the decline of Athenian liberty. The free speech of comedy was in that commonwealth what the freedom of the press is in our own; and, in both cases, the risk of its occasional abuse was not so dangerous as its suppression.

Something must be said of the personal history of our author himself, though such biographical account of him as we have is more or less apocryphal. He was no doubt a free citizen of Athens, because when the great popular demagogue Cleon, whom he had so bitterly satirised on the stage, took his revenge by an attempt to prove the contrary in a court of law, he failed in his purpose. Aristophanes was also probably a man of some wealth, since he had property, as he tells us in one of his plays, in the island of Ægina. In politics and in social questions he was a stanch Conservative; proud of the old days of Athenian greatness, jealous of the new habits and fashions which he thought tended to enervate the youth of the state, and the new systems of philosophy which were sapping the foundations of morality and honesty. His conservatism tended perhaps to the extreme, or at least takes that appearance in the exaggeration natural to the comic satirist; for he certainly appears occasionally as the champion of a pre-scientific age, when gymnastics held a higher place in education than philosophy, and when the stout Athenian who manned the galleys at Salamis thought he knew enough if he "knew how to ask for barley-cake, and shout his yo-heave-oh!"* He was as much of an aristocrat as a man might be, to

* The Frogs, l. 1073.

be an Athenian: he hated the mob-orators of his time, not only for their principles but for their vulgar origin, with an intensity which he did not care to disguise, and which, had not his wit and his boldness made him a popular favourite, rather in spite of his opinions than because of them, would have brought him into even more trouble than it actually did. He began to write for the stage at a very early age—so early, that he was not allowed by law to produce his two first pieces (now unfortunately lost) in his own name. Some of the old commentators would have us believe that he wrote his first comedy when he was only eighteen, but this, from internal evidence, seems improbable; he must have been five or six years older. He supplied the dramatic festivals with comedies, more or less successful, for at least thirty-seven years (from B.C. 427 to 390); but of the forty plays which he is known to have produced we have only eleven, and some of them in a more or less imperfect form. For the preservation of these, according to ancient tradition, we are indebted to one who might have seemed a very unlikely patron for this kind of pagan literature—no other than St John Chrysostom. That worthy father of the Church is said to have slept with a manuscript of Aristophanes under his pillow; it is at least certain that he had studied his plays and admired them, since he has not unfrequently imitated their language in his own writings.

Some enthusiastic admirers of Aristophanes would have us regard him not only as a brilliant humorist, but as a high moral teacher, concealing a grand design under the mask of a buffoon. They seem to think

that he was impelled to write comedy chiefly by a patriotic zeal for the welfare of Athens, and a desire to save his countrymen from corrupting influences. This is surely going too far. His comedies have a political cast, mainly because at Athens every man was a politician; and no doubt the opinions which he advocates are those which he honestly entertained. But he would probably have been content himself with the reputation of being what he was,—a brilliant and successful writer for the stage; a vigorous satirist, who lashed vice by preference, but had also a jest ready against ungainly virtue; a professional humorist who looked upon most things on their ludicrous side; who desired to be honest and manly in his vocation, and, above all things, not to be dull.

It may be right to say a word here, very briefly, as to the coarseness of the great comedian. It need not be said that it will find no place in these pages. He has been censured and apologised for on this ground, over and over again. Defended, strictly speaking, he cannot be. His personal exculpation must always rest upon the fact, that the wildest licence in which he indulged was not only recognised as permissible, but actually enjoined as part of the ceremonial at these festivals of Bacchus: that it was not only in accordance with public taste, but was consecrated (if terms may be so abused) as a part of the national religion. Such was the curse which always accompanied the nature-worship of Paganism, and infected of necessity its literature. But the coarseness of Aristophanes is not corrupting. There is nothing immoral in his

plots, nothing really dangerous in his broadest humour. Compared with some of our old English dramatists, he is morality itself. And when we remember the plots of some French and English plays which now attract fashionable audiences, and the character of some modern French and English novels not unfrequently found upon drawing-room tables, the least that can be said is, that we had better not cast stones at Aristophanes.

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHTS.

THE two first comedies which Aristophanes brought out — 'The Revellers' and 'The Babylonians' — are both unfortunately lost to us. The third was 'The Acharnians,' followed in the next year by 'The Knights.' It may be convenient, for some reasons, to begin our acquaintance with the author in this latter play, because it is that into which he seems to have thrown most of his personality as well as the whole force of his satiric powers. There was a reason for this. In its composition he had not only in view his fame as a dramatic writer, or the advocacy of a political principle, but also a direct personal object.

It is now the eighth year of the Peloponnesian War, in which all Greece is ranged on the side of the two great contending powers, Athens and Sparta. The great Pericles—to whose fatal policy, as Aristophanes held, its long continuance has been due—has been six years dead. His place in the commonwealth has been taken by men of inferior mark. And the man who is now most in popular favour, the head of the demo-

cratic interest, now completely in the ascendant, is the poet's great enemy, Cleon: an able but unscrupulous man, of low origin, loud and violent, an able speaker and energetic politician. Historians are at variance as to his real claim to honesty and patriotism, and it remains a question never likely to be set at rest. It would be manifestly unfair to decide it solely on the evidence of his satirical enemy. He and his policy had been fiercely attacked in the first comedy produced by Aristophanes—'The Babylonians,' of which only the merest fragment has come down to us. But we know that in it the poet had satirised the abuses prevalent in the Athenian government, and their insolence to their subject-allies, under the disguise of an imaginary empire, the scene of which he laid in Babylon. Cleon had revenged himself upon his satirist by overwhelming him with abuse in the public assembly, and by making a formal accusation against him of having slandered the state in the presence of foreigners and aliens, and thus brought ridicule and contempt upon the commonwealth of Athens. In the drama now before us, the author is not only satirising the political weakness of his countrymen; he is fulfilling the threat which he had held out the year before in his 'Acharnians,'—that he would "cut up Cleon the tanner into shoe-leather for the Knights,"—and concentrating the whole force of his wit, in the most unscrupulous and merciless fashion, against his personal enemy. In this bitterness of spirit the play stands in strong contrast with the good-humoured burlesque of 'The Acharnians' and 'The Peace,' or, indeed, with any

other of the author's productions which have reached us.

This play follows the fashion of the Athenian stage in taking its name from the Chorus, who are in this case composed of THE KNIGHTS—the class of citizens ranking next to the highest at Athens. A more appropriate title, if the title is meant to indicate the subject, would be that which Mr Mitchell gives it in his translation—'The Demagogues.' The principal character in the piece is "Demus"—*i.e.*, People: an impersonation of that many-headed monster the Commons of Athens, the classical prototype of Swift's John Bull; and the satire is directed against the facility with which he allows himself to be gulled and managed by those who are nominally his servants but really his masters—those noisy and corrupt demagogues (and one in particular, just at present) who rule him for their own selfish ends.

The characters represented are only five. "People" is a rich householder—selfish, superstitious, and sensual—who employs a kind of major-domo to look after his business and manage his slaves. He has had several in succession, from time to time. The present man is known in the household as "The Paphlagonian," or sometimes as "The Tanner"—for the poet does not venture to do more than thus indicate Cleon by names which refer either to some asserted barbarian blood in his family, or to the occupation followed by his father. He is an unprincipled, lying rascal; a slave himself, fawning and obsequious to his master, while cheating him abominably—insolent and bullying towards the fellow-slaves who are under his command. Two of

these are Nicias and Demosthenes—the first of them holding the chief naval command at this time, with Demosthenes as one of his vice-admirals. These characters bear the real names in most of the manuscripts, though they are never so addressed in the dialogue; but they would be readily known to the audience by the masks in which the actors performed the parts. But in the case of Cleon, no artist was found bold enough to risk his powerful vengeance by caricaturing his features, and no actor dared to represent him on the stage. Aristophanes is said to have played the part himself, with his face, in the absence of a mask, smeared with wine-lees, after the primitive fashion, when "comedy" was nothing more than a village revel in celebration of the vintage. Such a disguise, moreover, served excellently well, as he declared, to imitate the purple and bloated visage of the demagogue. The remaining character is that of "The Black-pudding-Seller," whose business in the piece will be better understood as it proceeds. The whole action takes place without change of scene (excepting the final tableau) in the open air, in front of Demus's house, the entrance to which is in the centre of the proscenium.

The two slaves, Nicias and Demosthenes, come out rubbing their shoulders. They have just had a lashing from the major-domo. After mutual condolences, and complaints of their hard lot, they agree to sit down together and howl in concert—to the last new fashionable tune—

"O oh, O oh,—O oh, O oh,—O oh, O oh!"

Perhaps the burlesque of the two well-known commanders bemoaning themselves in this parody of popular music does not imply more childishness on the part of an Athenian audience than the nigger choruses and comic operas of our own day. But, as Demosthenes, the stronger character of the pair, observes at last—"crying's no good." They must find some remedy. And there is one which occurs to him,—an effectual one—but of which the very name is terrible, and not safely to be uttered. It lies in a word that may be fatal to a slave, and is always of ill omen to Athenian ears. At last, after a fashion quite untranslatable, they contrive to say it between them—"Run away." The idea seems excellent, and Demosthenes proposes that they should take the audience into their confidence, which accordingly they do,—begging them to give some token of encouragement if the plot and the dialogue so far please them:—

"*Dem.* (*to the audience.*) Well, come now! I'll tell ye
about it—Here are we,
A couple of servants—with a master at home
Next door to the hustings. He's a man in years,
A kind of a bean-fed,* husky, testy character,
Choleric and brutal at times, and partly deaf.
It's near about a month now, that he went
And bought a slave out of a tanner's yard,
A Paphlagonian born, and brought him home,—
As wicked a slanderous wretch as ever lived.
This fellow, the Paphlagonian, has found out

* Alluding to the passion of the Athenian citizens for the law-courts, in which the verdict was given by depositing in the ballot-boxes a black or white bean or pebble.

The blind side of our master's understanding,
With fawning and wheedling in this kind of way:
'Would not you please go to the bath, sir? surely
It's not worth while to attend the courts to-day.'
And—'Would not you please to take a little refreshment?
And there's that nice hot broth—and here's the threepence
You left behind you—and would not you order supper?'
Moreover, when we get things out of compliment
As a present for our master, he contrives
To snatch 'em and serve 'em up before our faces.
I'd made a Spartan cake at Pylos lately,
And mixed and kneaded it well, and watched the baking;
But he stole round before me and served it up:*
And he never allows us to come near our master
To speak a word; but stands behind his back

* This affair at Pylos is so repeatedly alluded to in this comedy, that at the risk of telling what to many readers is a well-known story, some explanation must be given here. About six months before this performance took place, a detachment of four hundred Spartans, who had been landed on the little island of Sphacteria, which closes in the Bay of Pylos (the modern Navarino), had been cut off by an Athenian squadron under Eurymedon and Demosthenes, and were closely blockaded there, in the hope of starving them into surrender. The Spartans offered terms of peace, for the men were all citizens of Sparta itself, and their loss would have been a calamity to the state. The proposal was refused by the triumphant Athenians; but afterwards the blockade was not maintained effectively, and the capitulation became doubtful. At this juncture, Cleon came forward in the Assembly, and boasted loudly that, if the command were given to him, he would bring the men prisoners to Athens within twenty days. He was taken at his word; and possibly to his own surprise, and certainly to the dismay of his political opponents, he made his boast good. The constant sneers at this exploit on the part of Cleon's enemies seem to prove that it was not the mere piece of good luck which they represented it.

At meal times, with a monstrous leathern fly-flap,
Slapping and whisking it round, and rapping us off.
Sometimes the old man falls into moods and fancies,
Searching the prophecies till he gets bewildered,
And then the Paphlagonian plies him up,
Driving him mad with oracles and predictions.
And that's his harvest. Then he slanders us,
And gets us beaten and lashed, and goes his rounds
Bullying in this way, to squeeze presents from us:
'You saw what a lashing Hylas got just now;
You'd best make friends with me, if you love your lives.'
Why then, we give him a trifle, or, if we don't,
We pay for it; for the old fellow knocks us down,
And kicks us on the ground."—(F.)

But, after all, what shall they do?—"Die at once," says the despondent Nicias—"drink bull's blood, like Themistocles." "Drink a cup of good wine, rather," says his jovial comrade. And he sends Nicias to purloin some, while their hated taskmaster is asleep. Warming his wits under its influence, Demosthenes is inspired with new counsels. The oracles which this Paphlagonian keeps by him, and by means of which he strengthens his influence over their master, must be got hold of. And Nicias—the weaker spirit—is again sent by his comrade upon the perilous service of stealing them from their owner's possession while he is still snoring.* He succeeds in his errand, and Demosthenes

* "A general feature of human nature, nowhere more observable than among boys at school, where the poor timid soul is always despatched upon the most perilous expeditions. Nicias is the fag—Demosthenes the big boy"—Frere.

The influence of oracles on the public mind at Athens during the Peloponnesian War is notorious matter of history.

(who has paid great attention to the wine-jar meanwhile) takes the scrolls from his hands and proceeds to unroll and read them, his comrade watching him with a face of superstitious eagerness. The oracles contain a prophetic history of Athens under its successive demagogues. First there should rise to power a hemp-seller, secondly a cattle-jobber, thirdly a dealer in hides—this Paphlagonian, who now holds rule in Demus's household. But he is to fall before a greater that is to come—one who plies a marvellous trade. Nicias is all impatience to know who and what this saviour of society is to be. Demosthenes, in a mysterious whisper, tells him the coming man is—a Black-pudding-seller!

"Black-pudding-seller! marvellous, indeed!
Great Neptune, what an art!—but where to find him?"

Why, most opportunely, here he comes! He is seen mounting the steps which are supposed to lead from the city, with his tray of wares suspended from his neck. The two slaves make a rush for him, salute him with the profoundest reverence, take his tray off carefully, and bid him fall down and thank the gods for his good fortune.

"*Black-P.-Seller.* Hallo! what is it?
Demosth. O thrice blest of mortals!
Who art nought to-day, but shall be first to-morrow!
Hail, Chief that shall be of our glorious Athens!
B.-P.-S. Prithee, good friend, let me go wash my tripes,
And sell my sausages—you make a fool of me.
Dem. Tripes, quotha! tripes? Ha-ha!—Look yonder, man—(*pointing to the audience.*)
You see these close-packed ranks of heads?

B.-P.-S. I see.

Dem. Of all these men you shall be sovereign chief,
Of the Forum, and the Harbours, and the Courts,
Shall trample on the Senate, flout the generals,
Bind, chain, imprison, play what pranks you will.

B.-P.-S. What,—I?

Dem. Yes—you. But you've not yet seen all;
Here—mount upon your dresser there—look out!

(*Black-Pudding-Seller gets upon the dresser, from which he is supposed to see all the dependencies of Athens, and looks stupidly round him.*)

You see the islands all in a circle round you?

B.-P.-S. I see.

Dem. What, all the sea-ports, and the shipping?

B.-P.-S. I see, I tell ye.

Dem. Then, what luck is yours!
But cast your right eye now towards Caria—there—
And fix your left on Carthage,—both at once.

B.-P.-S. Be blest if I shan't squint—if that's good luck."

The Black-pudding-man is modest, and doubts his own qualifications for all this preferment. Demosthenes assures him that he is the very man that is wanted. "A rascal—bred in the forum,—and with plenty of brass;" what could they wish for more? Still, the other fears he is "not strong enough for the place." Demosthenes begins to be alarmed: modesty is a very bad symptom in a candidate for preferment; he is afraid, after all, that the man has some hidden good qualities which will disqualify him for high office. Possibly, he suggests, there is some gentle blood in the family? No, the other assures him: all his ancestors have been born blackguards like himself, so far as he knows. But he has had no education—he can but

barely spell. The only objection, Demosthenes declares, is that he has learnt even so much as that.

"The only harm is, you can spell at all;
Our leaders of the people are no longer
Your men of education and good fame;
We choose the illiterate and the blackguards, always."

Demosthenes proceeds to tell him of a prophecy, found amongst the stolen scrolls, in which, after the enigmatical fashion of such literature, it is foretold that the great tanner-eagle shall be overcome by the cunning serpent that drinks blood. The tanner-eagle is plainly none other than this Paphlagonian hide-seller; and as to his antagonist, what can be plainer? It is the resemblance of Macedon to Monmouth. "A serpent is long, and so is a black-pudding; and both drink blood." So Demosthenes crowns the new-found hero with a garland, and they proceed to finish the flagon of wine to the health of the conqueror in the strife that is to come. Nor will allies be wanting:—

"Our Knights—good men and true, a thousand strong,—
Who hate the wretch, shall back you in this contest;
And every citizen of name and fame,
And each kind critic in this goodly audience,
And I myself, and the just gods besides.
Nay, never fear; you shall not see his features;
For very cowardice, the mask-makers
Flatly refused to mould them. Ne'ertheless,
He will be known,—our friends have ready wits."

At this moment the dreaded personage comes out from the house in a fury. The Black-pudding-man takes to flight at once, leaving his stock-in-trade behind him, but is hauled back by Demosthenes, who

loudly summons the "Knights" to come to the rescue, —and with the usual rhythmical movement, and rapid chant, the Chorus of Knights sweep up through the orchestra.

"Close around him and confound him, the confounder of us all!
Pelt him, pummel him, and maul him,—rummage, ransack, overhaul him!
Overbear him, and out-bawl him; bear him down, and bring him under!
Bellow like a burst of thunder—robber, harpy, sink of plunder!
Rogue and villain! rogue and cheat! rogue and villain! I repeat.
Oftener than I can repeat it has the rogue and villain cheated.
Close upon him left and right—spit upon him, spurn and smite;
Spit upon him as you see: spurn and spit at him, like me."

They surround and hustle the representative of Cleon, who calls in vain for his partisans to come to his assistance. The Black-pudding man takes courage, and comes to the front; and a duel in the choicest Athenian Billingsgate takes place, in which the current truths or slanders of the day are paraded, no doubt much to the amusement of an Athenian audience —hardly so to the English reader. The new champion shows himself at least the equal of his antagonist in this kind of warfare, and the Chorus are delighted. "There is something hotter, after all, than fire—a more consummate blackguard has been found than Cleon!" From words the battle proceeds to blows, and the Paphlagonian retires discomfited, threatening

his antagonist with future vengeance, and challenging him to meet him straightway before the Senate.*

The Chorus fill up the interval of the action by an address to the audience; in which, speaking on the author's behalf, they apologise on the ground of modesty for his not having produced his previous comedies in his own name and on his own responsibility, and make a complaint—common to authors in all ages—of the ingratitude of the public to its popular favourites of the hour. Thence the chant passes into an ode to Neptune, the tutelary god of a nation of seamen, and to Pallas Athene, who gives her name to the city. And between the pauses of the song they rehearse, in a kind of recitative, the praises of the good old days of Athens.

"Let us praise our famous fathers, let their glory be recorded,
On Minerva's mighty mantle consecrated and embroidered.
That with many a naval action, and with infantry by land,
Still contending, never ending, strove for empire and command.
When they met the foe, disdaining to compute a poor account
Of the number of their armies, of their muster and amount:
But whene'er at wrestling matches they were worsted in the fray,
Wiped their shoulders from the dust, denied the fall, and fought away.
Then the generals never claimed precedence, or a separate seat,
Like the present mighty captains, or the public wine or meat.

* The Senate was an elective Upper Chamber, in which all "bills" were brought in and discussed, before they were put to the vote in the General Assembly.

As for us, the sole pretension suited to our birth and years,
Is with resolute intention, as determined volunteers,
To defend our fields and altars, as our fathers did before;
Claiming as a recompense this easy boon, and nothing more:
When our trials with peace are ended, not to view us with malignity,
When we're curried, sleek and pampered, prancing in our pride and dignity." *—(F.)

This Chorus has been imitated, in the true Aristophanic vein, by Mr Trevelyan, in his 'Ladies in Parliament:'—

"We much revere our sires, who were a mighty race of men;
For every glass of port we drink, they nothing thought of ten.
They dwelt above the foulest drains: they breathed the closest air:
They had their yearly twinge of gout, and little seemed to care.
They set those meddling people down for Jacobins or fools,
Who talked of public libraries and grants to normal schools;
Since common folks who read and write, and like their betters speak,
Want something more than pipes and beer, and sermons once a-week.
And therefore both by land and sea their match they rarely met,
But made the name of Britain great, and ran her deep in debt.
They seldom stopped to count the foe, nor sum the moneys spent,
But clenched their teeth, and straight ahead with sword and musket went.
And, though they thought if trade were free that England ne'er would thrive,
They freely gave their blood for Moore, and Wellington, and Clive.
And though they burned their coal at home, nor fetched their ice from Wenham,
They played the man before Quebec, and stormed the lines at Blenheim.
When sailors lived on mouldy bread, and lumps of rusty pork,
No Frenchman dared his nose to show between the Downs and Cork;
But now that Jack gets beef and greens, and next his skin wears flannel,
The 'Standard' says, we've not a ship in plight to keep the Channel."

From these praises of themselves—the Knights—they pass on, in pleasant banter, to the praises of their horses,—who, as the song declares, took a very active part in the late expedition against Corinth, in which the cavalry, conveyed in horse-transports, had done excellent service.

" Let us sing the mighty deeds of our illustrious noble steeds :
They deserve a celebration for their service heretofore,—
Charges and attacks,—exploits enacted in the days of yore :
These, however, strike me less, as having been performed ashore.
But the wonder was to see them, when they fairly went aboard,
With canteens, and bread, and onions, victualled and completely stored,
Then they fixed and dipped their oars, beginning all to shout and neigh,
Just the same as human creatures,—' Pull away, boys ! pull away !
Bear a hand there, Roan and Sorrel ! Have a care there, Black and Bay ! '
Then they leapt ashore at Corinth ; and the lustier younger sort
Strolled about to pick up litter, for their solace and disport:
And devoured the crabs of Corinth, as a substitute for clover,
So that a poetic *Crabbe** exclaimed in anguish—' All is over !
What awaits us, mighty Neptune, if we cannot hope to keep
From pursuit and persecution in the land or in the deep ? ' "
—(F.)

* Karkinos (*Crab*) was an indifferent tragedian of the day, some of whose lines are here parodied.

As the song ends, their champion returns triumphant from his encounter with Cleon in the Senate. The Knights receive him with enthusiasm, and he tells for their gratification the story of his victory, which he ascribes to the influence of the great powers of Humbug and Knavery, Impudence and Bluster, whom he had piously invoked at the outset. He had distracted the attention of the senators from his rival's harangue by announcing to them the arrival of a vast shoal of anchovies, of which every man was eager to secure his share. In vain had Cleon tried to create a diversion in his own favour by the announcement that a herald had arrived from Sparta to treat of peace. "Peace, indeed, when anchovies are so cheap!—never." Then rushing into the market, he had bought up the whole stock-in-trade of coriander-seed and wild onions —seasoning for the anchovies—and presented them with a little all round. This won their hearts completely. "In short," says this practical politician, "I bought the whole Senate for sixpennyworth of coriander-seed!" A tolerably severe satire upon the highest deliberative assembly at Athens.

But Cleon is not conquered yet. Rushing on the stage in a storm of fury, he vows he will drag his rival before PEOPLE himself. There no one will have any chance against him; for he knows the old gentleman's humour exactly, and feeds him with the nice soft pap which he likes. "Ay," says the other—"and, like the nurses, you swallow three mouthfuls for every one you give him." He is perfectly willing to submit

their respective claims to the master whose stewardship they are contending for. So both knock loudly at Demus's door; and the impersonation of the great Athenian Commons comes out — not in very good case as regards dress and personal comforts, as may be gathered from the dialogue which follows; his majordomo has not taken over-good care of him, after all.

The rival claimants seize him affectionately by either arm, and profess their attachment; while he eyes them both with a divided favour, like Captain Macheath in our comic opera. "I love you," says the Paphlagonian: "I love you better," says the other. "Remember, I brought you the Spartans from Pylos."* "A pretty service," says the Black-pudding-man,—"just like the mess of meat once I stole which another man had cooked." "Call a public assembly, and decide the matter, then," says Cleon. "No — not in the assembly—not in the Pnyx," begs the other; "Demus is an excellent fellow at home, but once set him down at a public meeting, and he goes wild!"

To the Pnyx, however, Demus vows they must all go; and to that place the scene changes. There the contest is renewed: but the interest of the political satire with which it abounds has passed away, in great measure, with the occasion. Some passages in this battle of words are more generally intelligible, as depending less upon local colour, but they are not such good specimens of the satirist's powers. The new aspirant

* See note, p. 19.

to office is shocked to find that Demus is left to sit unprotected on the cold rock (on which the Pnyx was built), and produces a little padded cushion of his own manufacture—a delicate attention with which the old gentleman is charmed. "What a noble idea!" he cries: "Do tell me your name and family—you must surely come of the patriot stock of Harmodius, the great deliverer of Athens!" Then his zealous friend notices the condition of his feet, which are actually peeping through his sandals, and indignantly denounces the selfishness of his present steward:—

"Tell me whether
You, that pretend yourself his friend, with all your wealth in leather,
Ever supplied a single hide to mend his reverend, battered Old buskins?

Dem. No, not he, by Jove; look at them, burst and tattered!

B.-P.-S. That shows the man! now, spick and span, behold my noble largess!
A lovely pair, bought for your wear, at my own cost and charges,

Dem. I see your mind is well inclined, with views and temper suiting,
To place the state of things—and toes—upon a proper footing.

B.-P.-S. But there now, see—this winter he might pass without his clothing;
The season's cold—he's chilly and old—but still you think of nothing;
Whilst I, to show my love, bestow this waistcoat as a present,
Comely and new, with sleeves thereto, of flannel, warm and pleasant.

Dem. How strange it is! Themistocles was reckoned
mighty clever;
With all his wit he could not hit on such a project ever;
Such a device! so warm! so nice! in short it equals
fairly
His famous wall, with port and all, that he contrived so
rarely."—(F.)

Not to be outdone in such attentions, Cleon offers his cloak, to keep his master from the cold; but Demus, who is already turning his fickle affections towards his new flatterer, rejects it—it stinks so abominably of leather. "That's it," says the other; "he wants to poison you; he tried it once before!"

The old gentleman has made up his mind that the new claimant is his best friend, and desires the Paphlagonian to give up his seal of office. The discarded minister begs that at least his employer will listen to some new oracles which he has to communicate. They promise that he shall be sovereign of all Greece, and sit crowned with roses. The new man declares that he has oracles too—plenty of them; and they promise that he shall rule not Greece alone, but Thrace, and wear a golden crown and robe of spangles. So both rush off to fetch their documents, while the Chorus break into a chant of triumph, as they prognosticate the fall of the great Demagogue before the antagonist who thus beats him at his own weapons.

The rivals return, laden with rolls of prophecy. Cleon declares he has a trunkful more at home; the Black-pudding-man has a garret and two outhouses full of them. They proceed to read the most absurd

parodies on this favourite enigmatical literature. Here is one which Cleon produces :—

"Son of Erectheus, mark and ponder well
This holy warning from Apollo's cell ;
It bids thee cherish him, the sacred whelp,
Who for thy sake doth bite and bark and yelp."

Demus shakes his head with an air of puzzled wisdom ; he cannot make it out at all. "What has Erectheus to do with a whelp?" "That's me," says Cleon ; "I watch and bark for you. I'm Tear'em, and you must make much of me." * "Not at all," says his rival ; "the whelp has been eating some of that oracle, as he does everything else. It's a defective copy ; I've got the complete text here : "—

"Son of Erectheus, 'ware the gap-toothed dog,
The crafty mongrel that purloins thy prog ;
Fawning at meals, and filching scraps away,
The whiles you gape and stare another way;
He prowls by night and pilfers many a prize
Amidst the sculleries and the—colonies."—(F.)

"That's much more intelligible," remarks the master. Cleon produces another, about a lion, who is to be carefully preserved "with a wooden wall and iron fortifications : "—"and I'm the lion." "I can give the interpretation of that," says the other ; "the wood and iron are the stocks that you are to put this fellow in." "That part of the oracle," says Demus,

* The speech of a late member for Sheffield—much missed in the House, and whom it would be most unfair to compare with Cleon—will occur to many readers : "I'm Tear'em."

"at any rate, is very likely to come true." And again he declares that his mind is made up; he shall make a change in his establishment forthwith. Once more Cleon begs a respite, until his master sees what nice messes he will bring him. The other assures him he has far better viands, all ready hot; and the sensual old Demus, licking his lips, will wait until he has made trial of both. While they are gone to fetch the dainties, the Chorus rallies him upon his being so open to the practices of his flatterers:—

CHORUS.

"Worthy Demus, your estate
Is a glorious thing, we own;
The haughtiest of the proud and great
Watch and tremble at your frown;
Like a sovereign or a chief,
But so easy of belief,
Every fawning rogue and thief
Finds you ready to his hand;
Flatterers you cannot withstand;
To them your confidence is lent,
With opinions always bent
To what your last advisers say,
Your noble mind is gone astray.

DEMUS.

.
But though you see me dote and dream,
Never think me what I seem;
For my confidential slave
I prefer a pilfering knave;
And when he's pampered and full-blown,
I snatch him up and dash him down.
.

Hark me—when I seem to doze,
When my wearied eyelids close,
Then they think their tricks are hid ;
But beneath the drooping lid
Still I keep a corner left,
Tracing every secret theft :
I shall match them by-and-by,
All the rogues you think so sly."—(F.)

The two candidates for office now run in from different directions, meeting and nearly upsetting each other, laden with trays of delicacies to tempt the master's appetite.

"*Dem.* Well, truly, indeed, I shall be feasted rarely ;
My courtiers and admirers will quite spoil me.
Cleon. There, I'm the first, ye see, to bring ye a chair.
B.-P.-S. But a table—here, I've brought it first and foremost.
Cleon. See here, this little half-meal cake from Pylos,
Made from the flour of victory and success.
B.-P.-S. But here's a cake ! see here ! which the heavenly goddess
Patted and flatted herself, with her ivory hand,
For your own eating.
Dem. Wonderful, mighty goddess !
What an awfully large hand she must have had !"—(F.)

Ragouts, pancakes, fritters, wine, rich cake, hare-pie, are all tendered him in succession. This last is brought by Cleon ; but the other cunningly directs his attention to some foreign envoys, whom he declares he sees coming with bags of gold ; and while Cleon runs to pounce upon the money, he gets possession of the pie, and presents it as his own offering—"Just as you did the prisoners from Pylos, you know." Demus

eats in turn of all the good things, and grows quite bewildered as to his choice between two such admirable purveyors. He cannot see on which side his best interests lie, and at last appeals helplessly to the audience to advise him. The Black-pudding-man proposes that as a test of the honesty of their service, he should search the lockers of each of them. His own proves to be empty; he has given all he had. But in the Paphlagonian's are found concealed all manner of good things, especially a huge cake, from which it appears he had cut off but a miserable slice for his master. This decides the question: Cleon is peremptorily desired to surrender his office at once. He makes a last struggle, and a scene ensues which reads like an antedated parody on the last meeting of Macbeth and Macduff. He holds an oracle which forewarns him of the only man who can overthrow his power. Where was his antagonist educated, and how?—"By the cuffs and blows of the scullions in the kitchen." What did his next master teach him!—"To steal, and then swear he did not." Cleon's mind misgives him. What is his trade, and where does he practise it? And when he learns that his rival sells black-puddings at the city gates, he knows that all is over—Birnam Wood is come to Dunsinane. He wildly tears his hair, and takes his farewell in the most approved vein of tragedy.

"O me! the oracles of heaven are sped!
Bear me within, unhappy! O farewell
Mine olive crown! Against my will I leave thee,
A trophy for another's brow to wear;

Perchance to prove more fortunate than me;
But greater rascal he can never be." *

Here the action of the drama might have ended; but the dramatist had not yet driven his moral home. He had to show what Athens might yet be if she could get rid of the incubus of her demagogues. A choral ode is introduced—quite independent, as is so often the case, of the subject of the comedy—chiefly perhaps, in this case, in order to give opportunity for what we must conclude was a change of scene. The doors in the flat, as we should call it, are thrown open, and disclose to view the citadel of Athens. There, seated on a throne, no longer in his shabby clothes, but in a magnificent robe, and glorious in renewed youth, sits Demus, such as he was in the days of Miltiades and Aristides. His new minister has a secret like Medea's, and has boiled him young again. "The good old times are come again," as he declares, thanks to his liberator. There shall be no more ruling by favour and corruption; right shall be might, and he will listen to no more flatterers. To crown the whole, his new minister leads forth Peace—beautiful Peace, *in propria persona*, hitherto hid away a close prisoner in the house of the Paphlagonian—and presents her to Demus in all her charms. And with this grand tableau the drama closes; it is not difficult

* A parody on the touching farewell of Alcestis to her nuptial chamber, in the tragedy of Euripides:—

"Farewell! and she who takes my place—may she
Be happier!—truer wife she cannot be."

to imagine, without being an Athenian, amid what thunders of applause. If the satire had been bitter and trenchant as to the faults and follies of the present—that unfortunate tense of existence, social and political, which appears never to satisfy men in any age of the world—this brilliant reminiscence of the glories of the past, and anticipation of a still more glorious future, was enough to condone for the poet the broadest licence which he had taken. Not indeed that any such apology was required. There was probably not a man among the audience—not a man in the state, except Cleon himself—who would not enjoy the wit far more than he resented its home application. That such a masterpiece was awarded the first prize of comedy by acclamation we should hardly doubt, even if we were not distinctly so informed. Those who know the facile temper of the multitude — and it may be said, perhaps, especially of the Athenian multitude — will understand, almost equally as a matter of course, that the political result was simply nothing. As Mr Mitchell briefly but admirably sums it up—"The piece was applauded in the most enthusiastic manner, the satire on the sovereign multitude was forgiven, and—Cleon remained in as great favour as ever." *

* Preface to The Knights.

CHAPTER III.

COMEDIES OF THE WAR: THE ACHARNIANS—THE PEACE—LYSISTRATA.

THE momentous period in the history of Greece during which Aristophanes began to write, forms the groundwork, more or less, of so many of his Comedies, that it is impossible to understand them, far less to appreciate their point, without some acquaintance with its leading events. All men's thoughts were occupied by the great contest for supremacy between the rival states of Athens and Sparta, known as the Peloponnesian War. It is not necessary here to enter into details; but the position of the Athenians during the earlier years of the struggle must be briefly described. Their strength lay chiefly in their fleet; in the other arms of war they were confessedly no match for Sparta and her confederate allies. The heavy-armed Spartan infantry, like the black Spanish bands of the fifteenth century, was almost irresistible in the field. Year after year the invaders marched through the Isthmus into Attica, or were landed in strong detachments on different points of the coast, while the powerful Bœo-

tian cavalry swept all the champaign, burning the towns and villages, cutting down the crops, destroying vines and olive-groves,—carrying this work of devastation almost up to the very walls of Athens. For no serious attempt was made to resist these periodical invasions. The strategy of the Athenians was much the same as it had been when the Persian hosts swept down upon them fifty years before. Again they withdrew themselves and all their movable property within the city walls, and allowed the invaders to overrun the country with impunity. Their flocks and herds were removed into the islands on the coasts, where, so long as Athens was mistress of the sea, they would be in comparative safety. It was a heavy demand upon their patriotism; but, as before, they submitted to it, trusting that the trial would be but brief, and nerved to it by the stirring words of their great leader Pericles. The ruinous sacrifice, and even the personal suffering, involved in this forced migration of a rural population into a city wholly inadequate to accommodate them, may easily be imagined, even if it had not been forcibly described by the great historian of those times. Some carried with them the timber framework of their houses, and set it up in such vacant spaces as they could find. Others built for themselves little "chambers on the wall," or occupied the outer courts of the temples, or were content with booths and tents set up under the Long Walls which connected the city with the harbour of Piræus. Some —if our comic satirist is to be trusted—were even fain to sleep in tubs and hen-coops. Provisions grew dear and

scarce. Pestilence broke out in the overcrowded city; and in the second and third years of the war, the Great Plague carried off, out of their comparatively small population, above 10,000 of all ranks. The lands were either left unsown, or sown only to be ravaged before harvest-time by the enemy. No wonder that, as year after year passed, and brought no respite from suffering to the harassed citizens, they began to ask each other how long this was to last, and whether even national honour was worth purchasing at this heavy cost. Even the hard-won victories and the successful blows struck by their admirals at various points on their enemies' coasts failed to reconcile the less warlike spirits to the continuance of the struggle. Popular orators like Cleon, fiery captains like Alcibiades, still carried the majority with them when they called for new levies and prophesied a triumphant issue; but there was a party at Athens, not so loud but still very audible, who said that such men had personal ambitions of their own to serve, and who had begun to sigh for "peace at any price."

But it needed a pressure of calamity far greater than the present to keep a good citizen of Athens away from the theatre. If the times were gloomy, so much the more need of a little honest diversion. And if the war party were too strong for him to resist in the public assembly, at least he could have his laugh out against them when caricatured on the stage. It has been already shown that the comic drama was to the Athenians what a free press is to modern commonwealths. As the government of France under Louis

XIV. was said to have been "a despotism tempered by epigrams," so the power of the popular leaders over the democracy of Athens found a wholesome check in the free speech—not to say the licence—accorded to the comedian. Sentiments which it might have been dangerous to express in the public assembly were enunciated in the most plain-spoken language by the actor in the new burlesque. The bolder the attack was, and the harder the hitting, the more the audience were pleased. Nor was it at all necessary, in order to the spectator's keen enjoyment of the piece, that he should agree with its politics. Many an admirer of the war policy of Lamachus laughed heartily enough, we may be sure, at his presentment on the stage in the caricature of military costume in which the actor dressed the part: just as many a modern Englishman has enjoyed the political caricatures of "H. B.," or the cartoons in 'Punch,' not a whit the less because the satire was pointed against the recognised leaders of his own party. It is probable that Aristophanes was himself earnestly opposed to the continuance of the war, and spoke his own sentiments on this point by the mouth of his characters; but the prevalent disgust at the hardships of this long-continued siege—for such it practically was—would in any case be a tempting subject for the professed writer of burlesques; and the caricature of a leading politician, if cleverly drawn, is always a success for the author. To win the verdict of popular applause, which was the great aim of an Athenian play-writer, he must above all things hit the popular taste.

The Peloponnesian War lasted for twenty-nine years—during most of the time for which our dramatist held possession of the stage. Nearly all his comedies which have come down to us abound, as we should naturally expect, in allusions to the one absorbing interest of the day. But three of them—'The Acharnians,' 'The Peace,' and 'Lysistrata,'—are founded entirely on what was the great public question of the day—How long was this grinding war to continue? when should Athens see again the blessings of peace? Treated in various grotesque and amusing forms, one serious and important political moral underlies them all.

THE ACHARNIANS.

'The Acharnians' might indeed have fairly claimed the first place here, on the ground that it was the earliest in date of the eleven comedies of Aristophanes which have been preserved to us. Independently of its great literary merits, it would have a special interest of its own, as being the most ancient specimen of comedy of any kind which has reached us. It was first acted at the great Lenæan festival held annually in honour of Bacchus, in February of the year 425 B.C., when the war had already lasted between six and seven years. It took its name from Acharnæ, one of the "demes," or country boroughs of Attica, about seven miles north of Athens; and the Chorus in the play is supposed to consist of old men belonging to the district. Acharnæ was the largest, the most fertile, and the most populous of all the demes, supplying a contingent of 3000 heavy-armed soldiers to the Athenian army. It lay right in the

invader's path in his march from the Spartan frontier upon the city of Athens: and when, in the first year of the war, the Spartan forces bivouacked in its cornfields and olive-grounds, and set fire to its homesteads, the smoke of their burning and the camp of the destroying enemy could be seen from the city walls. The effect was nearly being that which the Spartan king Archidamus had desired. The Athenians—and more especially the men of Acharnæ, now cooped within the fortifications of the capital—clamoured loudly to be led out to battle; and it needed all the influence of Pericles to restrain them from risking an engagement in which he knew they would be no match for the invaders. The Acharnians, therefore, had their national hostility to the Spartans yet more imbittered by their own private sufferings. Yet it was not unnatural that a sober-minded and peaceful yeoman of the district, remembering what his native canton had suffered and was likely to suffer again, should strongly object to the continuance of a war carried on at such a cost. His zeal for the national glory of Athens and his indignation against her enemies might be strong: but the love of home and property is a large component in most men's patriotism. He was an Athenian by all means—but an Acharnian first.

Such a man is Dicæopolis, the hero of this burlesque. He has been too long cooped up in Athens, while his patrimony is being ruined: and in the first scene he comes up to the Pnyx—the place where the public assembly was held—grumbling at things in general, and the war in particular. The members of the Committee on Public Affairs come, as usual, very late to

business—every one, in this city life, is so lazy, as the Acharnian declares: but when business does begin, an incident occurs which interests him very much indeed. One Amphitheus — a personage who claims to be immortal by virtue of divine origin—announces that he has obtained, perhaps on that ground, special permission from the gods to negotiate a peace with Sparta. But there is one serious obstacle; nothing can be done in this world, even by demigods, without money, and he would have the Committee supply him with enough for his long journey. Such an outrageous request is only answered on the part of the authorities by a call for "Police!" and the applicant, in spite of the remonstrances of Dicæopolis at such unworthy treatment of a public benefactor, is summarily hustled out of court. Dicæopolis, however, follows him, and giving him eight shillings—or thereabouts—to defray his expenses on the road, bids him haste to Sparta and bring back with him, if possible, a private treaty of peace—for himself, his wife and children, and maid-servant. Meanwhile the "House" is occupied with the reception of certain High Commissioners who have returned from different foreign embassies. Some have been to ask help from Persia, and have brought back with them "the Great King's Eye, Sham-artabas" (Dicæopolis is inclined to look upon him as a sham altogether)—who is, in fact, all eye, as far as the mask-maker's art can make him so. He talks a jargon even more unintelligible than modern diplomatic communications, which the envoys explain to mean that the king will send the Athenians a sub-

sidy of gold, but which Dicæopolis interprets in quite a contrary sense. Others have come back from a mission to Thrace, and have brought with them a sample of the warlike auxiliaries which Sitalces, prince of that country (who had a sort of Athenomania), is going to send to their aid—at two shillings a-day; some ragamuffin tribe whose appearance on the stage was no doubt highly ludicrous, and whose character is somewhat like that of Falstaff's recruits, or Bombastes Furioso's "brave army," since their first exploit is to steal Dicæopolis's luncheon: a palpable warning against putting trust in foreign hirelings.

Within a space of time so brief as to be conceivable upon the stage only, Amphitheus has returned from Sparta, to the great joy of Dicæopolis. His mission has been successful. But he is quite out of breath; for the Acharnians, finding out what his business is, have hunted and pelted him up to the very walls of Athens. "Peace, indeed! a pretty fellow you are, to negotiate a peace with our enemies after all our vines and corn-fields have been destroyed!" He has escaped them, however, for the present, and has brought back with him three samples of Treaties —in three separate wine-skins. The contents are of various growth and quality.*

"*Dic.* You've brought the Treaties?
Amph. Ay, three samples of them;
This here is a five years' growth—taste it and try.

* Half the joke is irreparably lost in English. The Greek word for "*treaty*" or "*truce*" meant literally the "*libation*" of wine with which the terms were ratified.

Dic. (*tastes, and spits it out*). Don't like it.
Amph. Eh?
Dic. Don't like it—it won't do;
There's an uncommon ugly twang of pitch,
A touch of naval armament about it.
Amph. Well, here's a ten years' growth may suit you better.
Dic. (*tastes again*). No, neither of them; there is a sort of sourness
Here in this last,—a taste of acid embassies,
And vapid allies turning to vinegar.
Amph. But here's a truce of thirty years entire,
Warranted sound.
Dic. (*smacking his lips and then hugging the jar*). O Bacchus and the Bacchanals!
This is your sort! here's nectar and ambrosia!
Here's nothing about providing three days' rations;*
It says, 'Do what you please, go where you will;'
I choose it, and adopt it, and embrace it,
For sacrifice, and for my private drinking.
In spite of all the Acharnians, I'm determined
To remove out of the reach of wars and mischief,
And keep the Feast of Bacchus on my farm."—(F.)

He leaves the stage on these festive thoughts intent. The scene changes to the open country in the district of Acharnæ, and here what we must consider as the second act of the play begins. The Chorus of ancient villagers—robust old fellows, "tough as oak, men who have fought at Marathon" in their day—rush in, in chase of the negotiators of this hateful treaty. Moving backwards and forwards with quick step in measured time across the wide orchestra (which, it must

* Which each soldier was required to take with him on the march.

be remembered, was their proper domain), they chant a strain of which the rhythm, at least, is fairly preserved in Mr Frere's translation :—

"Follow faster, all together! search, inquire of every one.
Speak—inform us—have you seen him? whither is the rascal run?
'Tis a point of public service that the traitor should be caught
In the fact, seized and arrested with the treaties he has brought."

Then they separate into two bodies, mutually urging each other to the pursuit, and leave the scene in different directions as Dicæopolis reappears. He is come to hold a private festival on his own account to Bacchus, in thanksgiving for the Peace which he, at all events, is to enjoy from henceforward. But he will have everything done in regular order, so far as his resources admit, with all the pomp and solemnity of a public festival. His daughter is to act as "Canephora," or basket-bearer, carrying the sacred emblems of the god —a privilege which the fairest and noblest maidens of Athens were proud to claim—and her mother exhorts her to move and behave herself like a lady,—if on this occasion only. Their single slave is to follow behind with other mystic emblems. But a spectacle is nothing, as Dicæopolis feels, without spectators; so he bids his wife go indoors, and mount upon the housetop to see the procession pass. Next to a caricature of their great men, an Athenian audience enjoyed a caricature of their religion. They had this much of excuse, that Paganism was full of tempting themes for

burlesque, of which their comic dramatists liberally availed themselves. But in truth there is a temptation to burlesque and parody presented by all religions, more or less, on their external side. Romanism and Puritanism have met with very similar treatment amongst ourselves; and one has only to refer to the old miracle-plays, and such celebrations as the Fête d'Ane, to be convinced how closely in such matters jest and earnest lie side by side.

But the festivities are very soon interrupted. The Acharnians have scented their prey at last, and rush in upon the celebrant with a shower of stones. Dicæopolis begs to know what crime he has committed. They soon let him know it: he has presumed to separate his private interest from the public cause, and to make a private treaty with the detested Spartans. They will listen to no explanation:—

"Don't imagine to cajole us with your argument and fetches!
You confess you've made a peace with these abominable wretches?
Dic. Well—the very Spartans even—I've my doubts and scruples whether
They've been totally to blame, in every instance, altogether.
Cho. Not to blame in every instance?—villain, vagabond! how dare ye?
Talking treason to our faces, to suppose that we shall spare ye?
Dic. Not so totally to blame; and I will show that, here and there,
The treatment they received from us has not been absolutely fair.

Cho. What a scandal! what an insult! what an outrage
on the state!
Are ye come to plead before us as the Spartans' advocate?"
—(F.)

Well,—yes, he is, if they will only listen to him; and so confident is he of the justice of his views, that he undertakes to plead his cause with his head laid upon a chopping-block, with full permission to his opponents to cut it off at once if he fails to convince them. Even this scanty grace the indignant Acharnians are unwilling to allow him, until he fortunately lays his hand upon an important hostage, whose life shall, he declares, be forfeited the moment they proceed to violence. He produces what looks like a cradle, and might contain a baby. It is really nothing more or less than a basket of charcoal—the local product and staple merchandise of Acharnæ. "Lo," says he to his irate antagonists, throwing himself into a tragic attitude and brandishing a dagger—"Lo, I will stab your darling to the heart!" The joke seems so very feeble in itself, that it is necessary to bear in mind that a well-known "situation" in a lost tragedy of Euripides (Telephus), which would have been fresh in the memory of an audience of such inveterate play-goers, is here burlesqued for their amusement. The threat brings the Acharnians to terms at once; they lay down their stones, and prepare to listen to argument, even in apology for the detested Spartans. The chopping-block is brought out; but before Dicæopolis begins to plead, he remembers that he is not provided with one very important requisite for a prisoner on

trial for his life. He ought to be clothed in "a most pathetical and heart-rending dress"—to move the compassion of his judges. Will they allow him just to step over the way and borrow one from that great tragedian Euripides, who keeps a whole wardrobe of pathetic costumes for his great characters? They give him leave; and as Euripides—most conveniently for dramatic purposes—appears to live close by, Dicæopolis proceeds at once to knock at the door of his lodging, and a servant answers from within. The humour of the scene which follows must have been irresistible to an audience who were familiar with every one of the characters mentioned, and who enjoyed the caricature none the less because they had, no doubt, applauded the tragic original.

"*Servant.* Who's there?
Dic. Euripides within?
Serv. Within, yet not within. You comprehend me?
Dic. Within and not within! why, what d'ye mean?
Serv. I speak correctly, old sire! his outward man
Is in the garret writing tragedy;
While his essential being is abroad,
Pursuing whimsies in the world of fancy.
Dic. O happy Euripides, with such a servant,
So clever and accomplished!—Call him out.
Serv. It's quite impossible.
Dic. But it must be done.
Positively and absolutely I must see him;
Or I must stand here rapping at the door.
Euripides! Euripides! come down,
If ever you came down in all your life!
'Tis I—'tis Dicæopolis from Chollidæ.
Eur. I'm not at leisure to come down.

Dic. Perhaps—
But here's the scene-shifter can wheel you round.
Eur. It cannot be.
Dic. But, however, notwithstanding.
Eur. Well, there then, I'm wheeled round; for I had not time
For coming down.
Dic. Euripides, I say!
Eur. What say ye?
Dic. Euripides! Euripides!
Good lawk, you're there! up-stairs! you write up-stairs,
Instead of the ground-floor? always up-stairs?
Well now, that's odd! But, dear Euripides,
If you had but a suit of rags that you could lend me!
You're he that brings out cripples in your tragedies,
A'nt ye? * You're the new Poet, he that writes
Those characters of beggars and blind people?
Well, dear Euripides, if could you but lend me
A suit of tatters from a cast-off tragedy!
For mercy's sake, for I'm obliged to make
A speech in my own defence before the Chorus,
A long pathetic speech, this very day;
And if it fails, the doom of death betides me.
Eur. Say, what d'ye seek? is it the woful garb
In which the wretched aged Æneus acted?
Dic. No, 'twas a wretcheder man than Æneus, much.
Eur. Was it blind Phœnix?
Dic. No, not Phœnix; no,
A fellow a great deal wretcheder than Phœnix."—(F.)

After some further suggestions on the part of Euripides of other tragic characters, whose piteous

* Telephus, Philoctetes, Bellerophon, and probably other tragedy heroes, were all represented by Euripides as lame. But no one could possibly have made greater capital out of the physical sufferings of Philoctetes from his lame foot than the author's favourite Sophocles.

"get-up" might excite the compassion of audience or judges, it turns out that the costume on which the applicant has set his heart is that in which Telephus the Mysian, in the tragedy which bears his name, pleads before Achilles, to beg that warrior to heal, as his touch alone could do, the wound which he had made. The whole scene should be read, if not in the original, then in Mr Frere's admirable translation. Dicæopolis begs Euripides to lend him certain other valuable stage properties, one after the other: a beggar's staff,—a little shabby basket,—a broken-lipped pitcher. The tragedian grows out of patience at last at this wholesale plagiarism of his dramatic repertory :—

"*Eur.* Fellow, you'll plunder me a whole tragedy!
Take it, and go.
Dic. Yes; I forsooth, I'm going.
But how shall I contrive? There's something more
That makes or mars my fortune utterly;
Yet give them, and bid me go, my dear Euripides:
A little bundle of leaves to line my basket.
Eur. For mercy's sake!.. But take them.—There they go!
My tragedies and all! ruined and robbed!
Dic. No more; I mean to trouble you no more.
Yes, I retire; in truth I feel myself
Importunate, intruding on the presence
Of chiefs and princes, odious and unwelcome.
But out, alas! that I should so forget
The very point on which my fortune turns;
I wish I may be hanged, my dear Euripides,
If ever I trouble you for anything,
Except one little, little, little boon,—
A single lettuce from your mother's stall."—(F.)

This parting shot at the tragedian's family antecedents

(for his mother was said to have been a herb-woman) is quite in the style of Athenian wit, which was nothing if not personal. Euripides very naturally orders the door to be shut in the face of this uncivil intruder, —who has got all he wanted, however. Clad in the appropriate costume, he lays his head on the chopping-block, while one of the Chorus stands over him with an axe; and in this ludicrous position makes one of those addresses to the audience which were usual in these comedies, in which the poet assumes for the moment his own character, and takes the house into his personal confidence. As he has already told Euripides,—

> "For I must wear a beggar's garb to-day,
> Yet be myself in spite of my disguise,
> That the audience all may know me."

He will venture upon a little plain-speaking to his fellow-Athenians, upon a very delicate subject, as he is well aware. But at this January festival, unlike the greater one in March, no foreigners were likely to be present, so that all that was said might be considered as between friends.

"The words I speak are bold, but just and true.
Cleon, at least, cannot accuse me now,
That I defame the city before strangers.
For this is the Lenæan festival,
And here we meet, all by ourselves alone;
No deputies are arrived as yet with tribute,
No strangers or allies; but here we sit,
A chosen sample, clean as sifted corn,
With our own denizens as a kind of chaff.
First, I detest the Spartans most extremely;
And wish that Neptune, the Tænarian deity,

Would bury them and their houses with his earthquakes.
For I've had losses—losses, let me tell ye,
Like other people: vines cut down and ruined.
But, among friends (for only friends are here),
Why should we blame the Spartans for all this?
For people of ours, some people of our own,—
Some people from amongst us here, I mean;
But not The PEOPLE—pray remember that—
I never said The PEOPLE—but a pack
Of paltry people, mere pretended citizens,
Base counterfeits, went laying informations,
And making confiscation of the jerkins
Imported here from Megara; pigs, moreover,
Pumpkins, and pecks of salt, and ropes of onions,
Were voted to be merchandise from Megara,
Denounced, and seized, and sold upon the spot."—(F.)

He goes on to mention other aggressions on the part of his own countrymen—to wit, the carrying off from Megara a young woman, no great loss to any community in point of personal character, but still a Megarian—aggressions not of much importance in themselves, but such as he feels sure no high-spirited nation could be expected to put up with:—

"Just make it your own case; suppose the Spartans
Had manned a boat, and landed on your islands,
And stolen a pug puppy-dog from Seriphos"—

why, as he says, the whole nation would have flown to arms at once to avenge the insult.

At this point he is interrupted. One party of the Acharnians are for making short work with such a blasphemer. But the other Semi-chorus vow that he says nothing but the truth, and dare them to lay hands

upon him. A struggle ensues, and the war faction call aloud for Lamachus—the "Great Captain" of the day. And that general, being ready within call (as every one is who is required for stage purposes), makes his appearance in grand military costume, with an enormous crest towering over his helmet, and a gorgon's head of gigantic dimensions upon his shield. He speaks in heroics, as befits him :—

"Whence falls that sound of battle on mine ear?
Who needs my help? for Lamachus is here!
Whose summons bids me to the field repair,
And wakes my slumbering gorgon from her lair?"

Dicæopolis is paralysed at the terrible vision, and humbly begs pardon of the hero for what he has said. Lamachus bids him repeat his words :—

"*Dic.* I—I can't remember—I'm so terrified.
The terror of that crest quite turned me dizzy:
Do take the hobgoblin away from me, I beseech you.*
Lam. (*takes off his helmet.*) There then.
Dic. Now turn it upside down.
Lam. See, there.
Dic. Now give me one of the feathers."—(F.)

And, to the general's great disgust, he pretends to use it to tickle his throat. He is so terribly frightened he

* Of course every Athenian would be amused by the parody of the well-remembered scene in the Iliad :—

"The babe clung crying to his nurse's breast,
Scared at the dazzling helm and nodding crest.
With secret pleasure each fond parent smiled,
And Hector hastened to relieve his child;
The glittering terrors from his brow unbound,
And placed the beaming helmet on the ground."

must be sick. Lamachus draws his sword, and makes at the scoffer; but in the tussle the general (to the great amusement, no doubt, of the audience) gets the worst of it. He indignantly demands to know who this vulgar fellow is, who has no respect for dignities:—

"*Dic.* I'll tell ye—an honest man; that's what I am.
A citizen that has served his time in the army,
As a foot-soldier, fairly; not like you,
Pilfering and drawing pay with a pack of foreigners."
—(F.)

He appeals to his audience—did any of them ever get sent out as High Commissioners, with large salaries, like Lamachus? Not one of them. The whole administration of the Athenian war office is nothing but rank jobbery. The general, finding the argument taking a rather personal and unpleasant turn, goes off, with loud threats of what he will do to the Spartans; and Dicæopolis, assuming his own acquittal by the Acharnians, proclaims, on the strength of his private treaty of peace, a free and open market on his farm for Megarians and Thebans, and all the Peloponnesian Greeks.

An interval between what we should call the acts of the play is filled up by a "*Parabasis*," as it was termed —a chant in which the Chorus pleads the author's cause with the audience. By his comedy of 'The Babylonians,' produced the year before, he had drawn upon him, as has been already said, the wrath of Cleon and his party, and they had even gone so far as to bring an indictment against him for treason against the state. And he now, by the mouth of the Chorus,

makes a kind of half-apology for his former boldness, and assures the spectators that he has never been really disloyal to Athens. As to Cleon the tanner—he will "cut him into shoe-soles for the Knights;" and we have already seen how he kept his word.

When the regular action of the comedy is resumed, Dicæopolis has opened his free market. The first who comes to take advantage of it is an unfortunate Megarian, who has been reduced to poverty by the war. His native district, lying midway between the two powerful neighbours, had in its perplexity taken what they thought the strongest side, had put an Athenian garrison to the sword, and had suffered terribly from the vengeance of the Athenians in consequence. They had been excluded, on pain of death, from all ports and markets within the Athenian rule, and twice in every year orders were given to march into their territory and destroy their crops. The misery to which the wretched inhabitants were thus reduced is described with a grim humour. The Megarian, having nothing else left to dispose of, has brought his two little daughters to market for sale.

"*Meg.* Ah, there's the Athenian market! heaven bless it,
I say; the welcomest sight to a Megarian.
I've looked for it, and longed for it, like a child
For its own mother. You, my daughters dear,
Disastrous offspring of a dismal sire,
List to my words, and let them sink impressed
Upon your empty stomachs; now's the time
That you must seek a livelihood for yourselves,
Therefore resolve at once, and answer me;
Will you be sold abroad, or starve at home?

Daughters (*both together*). Let us be sold, papa! Let us be sold!

Meg. I say so too; but who do ye think will purchase
Such useless, mischievous commodities?
However, I have a notion of my own,
A true Megarian scheme; I mean to sell ye
Disguised as pigs, with artificial pettitoes.
Here, take them, and put them on. Remember now,
Show yourselves off; do credit to your breeding,
Like decent pigs; or else, by Mercury,
If I'm obliged to take you back to Megara,
There you shall starve, far worse than heretofore.
This pair of masks too—fasten 'em on your faces,
And crawl into the sack there on the ground.
Mind ye, remember—you must squeak and whine."—(F.)

After some jokes upon the subject, not over-refined, Dicæopolis becomes the purchaser of the pair for a peck of salt and a rope of onions. He is sending the Megarian home rejoicing, and wishing that he could make as good a bargain for his wife and his mother as well, when that curse of the Athenian commonwealth, an informer, comes upon the scene. He at once denounces the pigs as contraband; but Dicæopolis calls the constables to remove him—he will have no informers in his market. The next visitor is a Theban, a hearty, good-humoured yeoman, but who disgusts Dicæopolis by bringing with him two or three pipers, whom the master of the market bids hold their noise and be off; Bœotian music, we are to understand, being always excruciating to the fine Athenian ear. The new-comer has brought with him, to barter for Athenian produce, fish, wild-fowl, and game of all kinds, including grasshoppers, hedgehogs, weasels, and

—writing-tables. But what attracts the attention of Dicæopolis most is some splendid Copaic eels.* He has not seen their sweet faces, he vows, for six years or more — never since this cursed war began. He selects the finest, and calls at once for brazier and bellows to cook it. The Bœotian naturally asks to be paid for this pick of his basket; but Dicæopolis explains to him that he takes it by the landlord's right, as "market-toll." For the rest of the lot, however, he shall have payment in Athenian wares. "What will he take?—sprats? crockery?" Nay, they have plenty of these things at home, says the Theban; he would prefer some sort of article that is plentiful in Attica and scarce at Thebes. A bright idea strikes Dicæopolis at once:—

"*Dic.* Ah! now I have it! take an Informer home with ye—
Pack him like crockery—and tie him fast.
Bœot. By the Twin Gods, I will! I'll make a show of him
For a tricksy ape. 'Twill pay me well, I warrant."

Apropos to the notion, an informer makes his appearance, and Dicæopolis stealthily points him out to the Bœotian. "He's small," remarks the latter, in depreciation. "Yes," replies the Athenian; "but every inch of him is thoroughly bad." As the man, intent on his

* Their reputation has continued down to modern days. "I was able to partake of some fine eels of an extraordinary size, which had been sent to us by the Greek primates of the city. They were caught in the Lake Copais, which, as in ancient times, still supplies the country round with game and wild-fowl."—Hughes's Travels in Greece, i. 33. (Note to Walsh's Aristophanes.)

vocation, is investigating the stranger's goods, and calling witnesses to this breach of the law, Dicæopolis gives the signal, and in a trice he is seized, tied up with ropes and straw like a large jar, and after a few hearty kicks—administered to him just to see whether he rings sound or not—this choice specimen of Athenian produce is hoisted on the shoulders of a slave, and carried off as a curiosity to Thebes.

The concluding scene brings out in strong contrast the delights of peace and the miseries of war. General Lamachus has heard of the new market, and cannot resist the temptation to taste once more some of its now contraband luxuries. He sends a slave to buy for him a three-shilling eel. But no eel shall the man of war get from Dicæopolis—no, not if he would give his gorgon-faced shield for it; and the messenger has to return to his master empty. A farmer who has lost his oxen in one of the raids made by the enemy, and has heard of the private supply of Peace which is in the possession of Dicæopolis, comes to buy a small measure of it for himself, even if not of the strongest quality—the "five-years' sort" would do. But he asks in vain. Next arrives a messenger from a newly-married bridegroom, who has a natural dislike under the circumstances to go on military service. Would Dicæopolis oblige him with a little of this blessed balsam, so that he may stay at home this one campaign?

"*Dic.* Take it away;
I would not part with a particle of my balsam
For all the world; not for a thousand drachmas.
But that young woman there—who's she?

Mess. The bridesmaid,
With a particular message from the bride,
Wishing to speak a word in private with you.
Dic. Well, what have ye got to say? let's hear it all.
Come—step this way—no, nearer—in a whisper—
Nearer, I say—Come then, now, tell me about it.
(*After listening with comic attention to a supposed whisper.*)
O, bless me! what a capital, comical,
Extraordinary string of female reasons
For keeping a young bridegroom safe at home!
Well, we'll indulge her, since she's only a woman;
She's not obliged to serve; bring out the balsam!
Come, where's your little vial?"—(F.)

While Dicæopolis is continuing his culinary preparations for the banquet which is to close the festival—preparations in which the old gentlemen of the Chorus, in spite of their objections to the truce, take a very lively interest—a messenger comes in hot haste to summon Lamachus. The Bœotians are meditating an attack on the frontier, hoping to take the Athenians at disadvantage at this time of national holiday. It is snowing hard; but the orders of the commanders-in-chief are imperative, and Lamachus must go to the front. And at this moment comes another messenger to call Dicæopolis to the banquet, which stays only for him. A long antithetic dialogue follows, pleasant, it must be supposed, to Athenian ears, who delighted in such word-fencing, tiresome to English readers. Lamachus orders out his knapsack; Dicæopolis bids his slave bring his dinner-service. The general, cursing all commanders-in-chief, calls for his plume; the Acharnian for roast pigeons. Lamachus calls for his spear;

Dicæopolis for the meat-spit. The hero whirls his gorgon shield round; the other mimics the performance with a large cheese-cake. Losing patience at last, partly through envy of such good fare, and partly at the mocking tone of the other, Lamachus threatens him with his weapon; Dicæopolis defends himself with the spit, like Bailie Nicol Jarvie with his hot poker; and so, after this passage of broad farce, the scene closes—the general shouldering his knapsack and marching off into the snow-storm, while the other packs up his contribution to the public supper, at which he hastens to take his place.

A brief interval, filled by a choral ode, allows time enough in dramatic imagination for Lamachus's expedition and for Dicæopolis's feast. A messenger from the army rushes in hot haste upon the stage, and knocks loudly at the door of the former. "Hot-water, lint, plaister, splints!" The general has been wounded. In leaping a ditch he has sprained his ankle and broken his head; and here he comes. As the discomfited warrior limps in on the one side, groaning and complaining, Dicæopolis, with a train of joyous revellers, enters on the other. He does not spare his jests and mockeries upon the other's miserable condition; and the piece closes with a tableau sufficiently suggestive of the advantages of peace over war—the general, supported by his attendants, having his wounds dressed, and roaring with pain, occupying one side of the stage; while the Acharnian revellers, crowned with garlands, shout their joyous drinking-songs to Bacchus on the other.

THE PEACE.

'The Peace' was brought out four years after 'The Acharnians,' when the war had already lasted ten years. This was not long before the conclusion of that treaty between the two great contending powers which men hoped was to hold good for fifty years, known as the Peace of Nicias. The leading idea of the plot is the same as in the previous comedy; the intense longing, on the part of the more domestic and less ambitious citizens, for relief from the prolonged miseries of the war.

Trygæus,—whose name suggests the lost merriment of the vintage,—finding no help in men, has resolved to undertake an expedition in his own person, to heaven, to expostulate with Jupiter for allowing this wretched state of things to go on. With this object in view (after some previous attempts with a ladder, which, owing to the want of anything like a *point d'appui*, have naturally resulted in some awkward falls), he has fed and trained a dung-beetle, which is to carry him up to the Olympian throne; there being an ancient fable to the effect that the creature had once upon a time made his way there in pursuit of his enemy the eagle.* It is a burlesque

* The old commentators assign the story to Æsop. The eagle had eaten the beetle's young ones; the beetle, in revenge, rolled the eagle's eggs out of her nest: so often, that the latter made complaint to her patron Jupiter, who gave her leave to lay her eggs in his bosom. The beetle flew up to heaven, and buzzed about the god's head, who jumped up in a hurry to catch his tormentor, quite forgetting his duty as nurse, and so the eggs fell out and were broken.

upon the aerial journey of Bellerophon on Pegasus, as represented in one of the popular tragedies of Euripides; and Trygæus addresses his strange steed as his "little Pegasus" accordingly. Mounted in this strange fashion, to the great alarm of his two daughters, he makes his appearance on the stage, and is raised bodily through the air, with many soothing speeches to the beetle, and a private "aside" to the machinist of the theatre to take great care of him, lest like his predecessor Bellerophon he should fall down and break his leg, and so furnish Euripides with another crippled hero for a tragedy. By some change of scenery he is next represented as having reached the door of Jupiter's palace, where Mercury, as the servant in waiting, comes out to answer his knock.

Mercury (*looks round and sniffs*). What's this I smell
—a mortal? (*Sees Trygæus on his beetle.*) O,
great Hercules!
What horrible beast is this?
Tryg. A beetle-horse.
Merc. O you abominable, impudent, shameless beast!
You cursed, cursed, thrice accursed sinner!
How came you up here? what business have you here?
O you abomination of abominations,
Speak—what's your name? D'ye hear?
Tryg. Abomination.
Merc. What place d'ye come from?
Tryg. From Abomination.
Merc. (*rather puzzled*). Eh?—what's your father's name?
Tryg. Abomination.
Merc. (*in a fury*). Look here now,—by the Earth, you
die this minute,
Unless you tell me your accursed name.

Tryg. Well—I'm Trygæus of Athmon; I can prune
A vine with any man—that's all. I'm no informer,
I do assure you; I hate law like poison.

Merc. And what have you come here for?

Tryg. (*pulling something out of a bag*). Well, you see,
I've brought you this beefsteak.

Merc. (*softening his tone considerably*). Oh, well—
poor fellow!
But how did you come?

Tryg. Aha, my cunning friend!
I'm not such an abomination, after all!
But come, call Jupiter for me, if you please.

Merc. Ha, ha! you can't see him, nor any of the gods;
They're all of them gone from home—went yesterday.

Tryg. Why, where on earth are they gone to?

Merc. Earth, indeed!

Tryg. Well, then, but where?

Merc. They're gone a long way off
Into the furthest corner of the heavens.

Tryg. And why are you left here, pray, by yourself?

Merc. Oh, I'm taking care of the pots and pans, and such-
like.

Tryg. What made them all leave home so suddenly?

Merc. Disgusted with you Greeks. They've given you up
To War, to do exactly what he likes with:
They've left him here to manage all their business,
And gone themselves as far aloft as possible,
That they may no more see you cutting throats,
And may be no more bothered with your prayers.

Tryg. What makes them treat us in this fashion—tell me?

Merc. Because you would have war, when they so often
Offered you peace. Whenever those fools the Spartans
Met with some small success, then it was always—
"By the Twin Gods, Athens shall catch it now!"
And then, when you Athenians got the best of it,
And Sparta sent proposals for a peace,

You would say always—"Oh, they're cheating us!
We won't be taken in—not we, by Pallas!
No, by great Jupiter! they'll come again
With better terms, if we keep hold of Pylos."

Tryg. That is uncommonly like what we *did* say.

No doubt it was: Aristophanes is writing history here with quite as much accuracy as most historians. Mercury goes on to explain to his visitor that the Greeks are never likely to see Peace again: War has cast her into a deep pit (which he points out), and heaped great stones upon her: and he has now got an enormous mortar, in which he proposes to pound all the cities of Greece, if he can only find a pestle big enough for his purpose. "But hark!" says Mercury —"I do believe he's coming out! I must be off." And while the god escapes, and Trygæus hides himself in affright from the terrible presence, War, a grim giant in full panoply, and wearing, no doubt, the most truculent-looking mask which the theatrical artist could furnish, comes upon the scene, followed by his man Tumult, who lugs a huge mortar with him. Into this vessel War proceeds to throw various ingredients, which represent the several towns and states which were the principal sufferers in the late campaigns: leeks for Prasiæ, garlic for Megara, cheese for Sicily. When he goes on to add some Attic honey to his olio, Trygæus can scarcely restrain himself from giving vent aloud to the remonstrance which he utters in an "aside"—not to use so terribly expensive an article. Tumult is forthwith despatched (with a cuff on the head for his slowness) to fetch a pestle of sufficient weight for his

master's purpose. He goes to Athens first; but their great war-pestle has just been lost—Cleon, the mainstay of the war party, has been killed in battle at Amphipolis, in Thrace. The messenger is next despatched to Sparta, but returns with no better success: the Spartans had lent their pestle to the Thracians, and Brasidas had fallen, with the Athenian general, in that same battle at Amphipolis. Trygæus, who all this while has been trembling in his hiding-place, begins to take heart, while War retires with his slave to manufacture a new pestle for himself. Now, in his absence, is the great opportunity to rescue Peace from her imprisonment. Trygæus shouts to all good Greeks, especially the farmers, the tradesmen, and the working classes, to come to his aid; and a motley Chorus, equipped with shovels, ropes, and crow-bars, appear in answer to his call. They give him a good deal of annoyance, however, because, true to their stage business as Chorus, instead of setting to work at once they will waste the precious minutes in dancing and singing,—a most incongruous proceeding, as he observes, when everything depends upon speed and silence; an amusing sarcasm from a writer of what we may call operatic burlesque upon the conventional absurdities which are even more patent in our modern serious opera than in Athenian comedy. At last they go to work in earnest, and succeed in bribing Mercury, who returns when War is out of the way, to help them. But to get Peace out of the pit requires, as Trygæus tells them, "a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether." And first the Bœotians will not pull, and then the

Argives, and then the Megarians; and Lamachus, the impersonation of the war party at Athens here as in 'The Acharnians,' gets in the way, and has to be removed; until at last the "country party"—the husbandmen—lay hold with a will, and Peace, with her companions "Plenty" and "Holiday," represented also by two beautiful women, is drawn up from the pit, and hailed with great joy by Trygæus and the Chorus. But Peace, for a while, stands silent and indignant in the midst of their congratulations. She will not open her lips, says Mercury, in the presence of this audience. She has confided the reason to him in a whisper—for she never speaks throughout the play: she is angry at having been thrice rejected by vote in the Athenian assembly when she offered herself to them after the affair of Pylos. But she is soon so far appeased, that with her two fair companions she accompanies Trygæus to earth. The beetle remains behind—having received an appointment to run under Jupiter's chariot and carry the lightning.

The last act—which, as is commonly the case with these comedies, is quite supplementary to what we moderns should call the catastrophe of the piece—takes place in front of Trygæus's country house, where he celebrates his nuptials with the fair Opóra (Plenty), whom Mercury has presented to him as the reward of his good service. The festival held on the occasion is represented on the stage with a detail which was probably not tedious to an Athenian audience. All who ply peaceful arts and trades are freely welcomed to it; while those who make their gain by war—the sooth-

sayer who promulgates his warlike oracles to delude men's minds, the trumpeter, the armourer, and the singer of war-songs—are all dismissed by the triumphant vine-dresser with ignominy and contempt.

One little point in this play is worth notice, as a trait of generous temper on the part of the dramatist. Cleon, his great personal enemy, was now dead. He has not been able to restrain himself from aiming a blow at him even now, as one of those whom he looks upon, justly or unjustly, as the authors of the miseries of Greece. But he holds his hand half-way. When Mercury is descanting upon some of these evils which went near to the ruin of Athens, he is made to say that "the Tanner"—*i. e.*, Cleon—was the cause of them. Trygæus interrupts him,—

> Hold—say not so, good master Mercury;
> Let that man rest below, where now he lies.
> He is no longer of our world, but yours.

This forbearance towards his dead enemy is turned off, it is true, with a jest to the effect that anything bad which Mercury could say of him now would be a reproach to that ghostly company of which the god had especial charge; but even under the sarcasm we may willingly think there lies a recognition of the great principle, that the faults of the dead should be buried with them.

LYSISTRATA.

The comedy of 'Lysistrata,' which was produced some ten years later, deals with the same subject from quite a different point of view. The war has now

lasted twenty-one years. The women of Athens have grown hopeless of any termination of it so long as the management of affairs is left in the hands of the men, and impatient of the privations which its continuance involves. They determine, under the leading of the clever Lysistrata,* wife to one of the magistrates, to take the question into their own hands. They resolve upon a voluntary separation from their husbands—a practical divorce *a mensa et thoro*—until peace with Sparta shall be proclaimed. The meeting of these fair conspirators is called very early in the morning, while the husbands (at least such few of them as the campaign has left at home) are in bed and asleep. By a liberal stage licence, the women of Sparta (who talk a very broad Doric), of Corinth, and Bœotia, and, in fact, the female representatives generally of all Greece, attend the gathering, in spite of distance and of the existence of the war. All take an oath to observe this self-denying ordinance strictly—not without an amusing amount of reluctance on the part of some weaker spirits, which is at last overcome by the firm example of a Spartan lady. It is resolved that a body of the elder matrons shall seize the Acropolis, and make themselves masters of the public treasury. These form one of the two Choruses in the play, the other being composed of the old men of Athens. The latter proceed (with a good deal of comic difficulty, owing to the steepness of the ascent and their shortness of breath) to attack the Acropolis,

* Her name, like most of those used in these comedies, is significant. It means, "Dissolver of the Army."

armed with torches and fagots and pans of charcoal, with which they hope to smoke out the occupants. But the women have provided themselves with buckets of water, which they empty on the heads of their assailants, who soon retire discomfited to call the police. But the police are in their turn repulsed by these resolute insurgents, whom they do not exactly know how to deal with. At last a member of the Public Committee comes forward to parley, and a dialogue takes place between him and Lysistrata. Why, he asks, have they thus taken possession of the citadel? They have resolved henceforth to manage the public revenues themselves, is the reply, and not allow them to be applied to carrying on this ruinous war. That is no business for women, argues the magistrate. "Why not?" says Lysistrata; "the wives have long had the management of the private purses of the husbands, to the great advantage of both." In short, the women have made up their minds to have their voice no longer ignored, as hitherto, in questions of peace and war. Their remonstrances have always been met with the taunt that "war is the business of men;" and to any question they have ventured to ask their husbands on such points, the answer has always been the old cry—old as the days of Homer—"Go spin, you jade, go spin!"* But they will put up with it no longer. As they have always had wit

* Hom. Iliad, vi. 490. Hector to Andromache :—

"No more—but hasten to thy tasks at home;
There guide the spindle and direct the loom."
—POPE.

enough to clear the tangled threads in their work, so they have no doubt of settling all these difficulties and complications in international disputes, if it is left to them. But what concern, her opponent asks, can women have with war, who contribute nothing to its dangers and hardships? "Contribute, indeed!" says the lady—"we contribute the sons who carry it on." And she throws down to her adversary her hood, her basket, and her spindle, and bids him "go home and card wool,"—it is all such old men are fit for; henceforth the proverb (of the men's making) shall be reversed,—"War shall be the care of the women." The magistrate retires, not having got the best of it, very naturally, in an encounter of words; and the Chorus of elders raise the cry—well known as a popular partisan-cry at Athens, and sure to call forth a hearty laugh in such juxtaposition—that the women are designing to "set up a Tyranny!"

But poor Lysistrata soon has her troubles. Her unworthy recruits are fast deserting her. They are going off to their husbands in the most sneaking manner—creeping out through the little hole under the citadel which led to the celebrated cave of Pan, and letting themselves down from the walls by ropes at the risk of breaking their necks. Those who are caught all have excellent excuses. One has some fleeces of fine Milesian wool at home which *must* be seen to,—she is sure the moths are eating them. Another has urgent occasion for the doctor; a third cannot sleep alone for fear of the owls—of which, as every one knows, there were really a great many at

Athens. The husbands, too, are getting uncomfortable without their housekeepers; there is no one to cook their victuals; and one poor soul comes and humbly entreats his wife at least to come home to wash and dress the baby.

It is becoming plain that either the war or the wives' resolution will soon give way, when there arrives an embassy from Sparta. *They* cannot stand this general strike of the wives. They are agreed already with their enemies the Athenians on one point—as to the women—that the old Greek comedian's * proverb, which we have borrowed and translated freely, is true,—

There is no living with 'em—or without 'em.

They are come to offer terms of peace. When two parties are already of one mind, as Lysistrata observes, they are not long in coming to an understanding. A treaty is made on the spot, with remarkably few preliminaries. The Spartan ambassadors are carried off at once to an entertainment in the Acropolis under the presidency of Lysistrata; and the Athenians find, as is so often the case when those who have been the bitterest opponents become better acquainted, that the Spartans are excellent fellows in their cups—nay, positively entertaining, as one of the plenipotentiaries who returns from the banquet declares; which last would be quite a new characteristic, to the ears of an

* Susarion. So also the Roman censor, Metellus Numidicus: "It is not possible to live with them in any comfort—or to live without them at all."—Aul. Gellius, i. 6.

Athenian audience, of their slow and steady neighbours. So charmed are the Chorus with the effect of a little wholesome conviviality upon national temper, that they deliver it as their decided opinion that in future all embassies to foreign states should be fairly drunk before they set out. When men are sober, they are critical and suspicious, and put a wrong interpretation on things, and stand upon their dignity; but under the genial influence of good liquor there is a disposition to make everything pleasant. And so, with two choric hymns, chanted by Spartans and Athenians in turn—so bright and graceful that they would seem out of place in such wild company, but that we know the poet meant them to herald the joy with which a real Peace would be welcomed—this broad extravaganza ends.

For the humour is indeed of the broadest, in some passages, even for Aristophanes. But in spite of coarse language, it has been justly said by modern critics in the poet's defence, that the moral of the piece is honest and true. The longing for that domestic happiness which has been interrupted and shattered by twenty years of incessant war, is a far more wholesome sentiment, in its nature and effects, than very much of modern sentiment which passes under finer names.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLOUDS.

THE satire in this, one of the best-known of Aristophanes's comedies, is directed against the new schools of philosophy which had been lately developed in Athens, and which reckoned among their disciples not only the more intellectual of the rising generation, but also a good many idle young men of the richer classes, who were attracted by the novelty of the tenets which were there propounded, the eloquence of the teachers, and the richness of illustration and brilliant repartee which were remarkable features in their method. There were several reasons which would make this new learning unpopular, whatever its real merits might have been. These men controverted popular opinions, and assumed to know more than other people—which was an offence to the dignity of the great Athenian commons. The lecturers themselves were nearly all of them foreigners—Thrasymachus from Chalcedon, Gorgias from Leontini in Sicily, Protagoras from Abdera in Thrace. These, with many others of less note, had brought their

talents to Athens as the great intellectual mart, where such ware was understood, and was sure to find its price, both in renown and in the grosser and more literal sense. Besides, they sneered (so it was said) at the national religion; and the national religion, especially to the lower ranks of citizens, meant holidays, and public feasts, and processions, and a good deal of licence and privilege which was very much valued. There were reasons, too, why the poet himself should be very willing to exercise his wit at the expense of the philosophers: to his conservative mind these outlandish teachers, with their wild speculations and doctrine of free thought, and generally aggressive attitude towards the established order of things, were especially objectionable.

The term "Sophist," though in its original and wider sense it was applied to the professors of philosophy generally, had come to mean, in the popular language of Athens, those who, for pay, undertook to teach a method of rhetoric and argument by which a man might prove anything whatever. It is against these public lecturers, who either taught or were commonly believed to teach this perversion of the great science of dialectics, that Aristophanes brings the whole weight of his biting humour to bear in 'The Clouds.' This is no place to inquire how far the accusation brought against them was or was not a fair one, or whether that abuse of their powers which was the disgrace of a few may not have been attributed by unjust clamour to a whole class of public teachers in which they were but the exceptions. It is possible to

believe not only, with Mr Grote, that the Sophists "bear the penalty of their name in its modern sense," but also that in their own day they bore the penalty of superior ability and intelligence in becoming the objects of dislike, and therefore of misrepresentation, and yet to understand how they may have afforded very fair material for the professional satirist. The art of public speaking, which these professors taught, is a powerful engine, which in unscrupulous hands may do as much to mislead as to instruct. That the love of disputation and the consciousness of power will tempt a clever man to maintain a paradox, and discomfit an opponent by what he knows to be a fallacy—that a keen intellect will delight in questioning an established belief—and that the shallow self-sufficiency of younger disciples will push any doctrine to its wildest extremes,—are moral facts for whose confirmation we have no need to go to ancient history. And we are not to suppose that either the poet or his audience intended the fun of the piece to be taken as serious evidence either of the opinions or the practice of any school whatever.

But the question which has, with much more reason, exercised the ingenuity of able critics, is the choice which Aristophanes has made of Socrates as the representative of this sophistical philosophy, and his motive in holding him up to ridicule, as he here does, by name. For Socrates, it is generally allowed, was the opponent of these Sophists, or at least of those objectionable doctrines which they were said to teach. But there were some very important points—and those

such as would come most under public observation—in which he, as a philosophical teacher, bore a broad resemblance to them. The whole character of this new intellectual movement in Greece was negative and critical, professing to aim rather at detecting error than establishing certainty. To this the method of Socrates formed no exception. His favourite assertion, that he himself knew nothing for certain, expressed this in the strongest form. And if the reproach brought against the Sophists was that they loved argument too much for argument's sake, and thought more of confounding an opponent than of demonstrating a truth, we have only to read some of the dialogues in which Socrates bears a part, as we have them recorded by his friends and pupils, to see that he at least supplied abundant ground to an ordinary hearer to say the same of him. He could scarcely have realised to the public of his own day the definition which Schiller gives of the true philosopher—"One who loves truth better than his system." Xenophon tells us that in argument he did what he liked with his opponents; and Plato has compared him to the mythical giant Antæus, who insisted that every stranger whom he met should try a fall with him.

It is of the very essence, again, of caricature to take gravity and wisdom for its subject. And caricature on the Athenian stage knew no limits in this. Nothing was sacred for the comic dramatist and his Chorus. The national gods, the great religious mysteries, the mighty Athenian people itself, were all made to put on the comic mask, and figure in the wild procession. Why

should the philosophers escape? The higher the ground upon which Socrates stood, the more tempting mark did he present. Lucian understood perfectly the kind of taste to which a writer of comedy must appeal at Athens, when, in his own defence for having made sport of the philosophers, he says: "For such is the temper of the multitude, they delight in listening to banter and abuse, especially when what is solemn and dignified is made the subject of it." *

But besides this, the author who was to write a new burlesque for the Athenians, and had resolved to take as his theme these modern vagaries of speculative philosophy, wanted a central figure for his piece. So in 'The Acharnians' he takes Lamachus, a well-known general of the day, to represent the passion for war which he there holds up to ridicule, and dresses him up with gorgon-faced shield and tremendous crest, in parody of military splendour: though we have no reason whatever to suppose that he had any private grudge against the man, or that Lamachus was more responsible for the war than others. Here the representative figure must be a philosopher, and well known. Whether his opinions were very accurately represented or not, probably neither the dramatist nor his audience would very much care. Who so convenient for his purpose as the well-known and remarkable teacher whose grotesque person must have struck every passer-by in the public streets, whose face, with its flat nose, lobster-like eyes, and thick lips, seemed a ready-made comic mask, and

* Lucian, Dial. 'Piscator.'

whose round and protuberant body made his very friends liken him to the figures of Silenus,—who went about barefooted, unwashed, and in shabby clothes, and would sometimes stand for half an hour in a public thoroughfare as it were wrapt in a dream? There is surely no need to imagine that the comic dramatist had any personal grudge against the philosopher, or any special horror of his particular teaching. Such an artist could hardly have helped caricaturing him, if he had been his personal friend.

The opening scene in this comedy is an interior. It represents a room in the house of Strepsiades, a well-to-do citizen, in which he and his son Pheidippides are discovered occupying two pallet-beds. The household slaves are supposed to be sleeping in an outer room, the door of which is open. So much of the antecedents of the drama as is required to be known in order to its ready comprehension come out at once in the soliloquy of the anxious father.

Str. (*yawning in his bed*). O—h!
Great Jove, how terribly long the nights are now!
Interminable! will it never be day, I wonder?
I'm sure I heard the cock crow long ago.
These slaves are snoring still, the rascals. Ah!
It was not so in the old times of peace.
Curse the war, I say, both for other reasons,
And specially that I daren't punish my own slaves.*
And there's that hopeful son of mine can sleep
Sound as a top, the whole night long, rolled up
Like a great sausage there, in five thick blankets.
Well—I suppose I'd as well put my head

* For fear lest they should desert at once to the enemy.

Under the clothes, and try to get a snooze.—
I can't—I *can't* get to sleep! There are things biting me—
I mean the bills, the stable expenses, and the debts
Run up for me by that precious son of mine.
And he—oh, he lives like a gentleman,
Keeps his fine horses, drives his curricle—
Is dreaming of them now, no doubt—while I lie vexing,
Knowing next month those notes of hand come due,
With interest mounting up. (*Calls to his slave without.*)
Boy! light a lamp;
Bring me my pocket-book, that I may see
How my accounts stand, and just cast them up.
(*Slave brings a lamp, and holds it while Strepsiades sits up and looks over his account-book.*)
Let's see now. First, here's Prasias, fifty pounds.
Now, what's that for? When did I borrow that?
Ah! when I bought that grey. Oh dear, oh dear!
I shall grow grey enough, if this goes on.

Ph. (*talking in his sleep*). That's not fair, Philo! keep your own side of the course!

Str. Ay, there he goes! that's what is ruining me;
He's always racing, even in his dreams.

Ph. (*still asleep*). How many times round do the war-chariots go?

Str. You make your old father's head go round, you do.
But let me see—what stands here next to Prasias?—
Twelve pounds to Amynias,—for a car and wheels.

Ph. There—give that horse a roll, and take him home.

Str. You'll roll me out of house and home, young man!
I've judgment debts against me, and the rest of them
Swear they'll proceed.

Ph. (*awaking*). Good heavens! my dear father,
What makes you groan and toss so all night long?

Str. There's a sheriff's officer at me—in the bed-clothes.

Ph. Lie quiet, sir, do pray, and let me sleep.

Str. Sleep, if you like; but these debts, I can tell you,
Will fall on your own head some day, young man.
Heugh! may those match-makers come to an evil end
Who drew me into marrying your good mother!
There I was living a quiet life in the country,—
Shaved once a-week, may-be, wore my old clothes—
Full of my sheep, and goats, and bees, and vineyards,
And I must marry the fine niece of Megacles.
The son of Megacles! an awkward country fellow
Marry a fine town belle, all airs and graces!
A pretty pair we were to come together—
I smelling of the vineyard and the sheep-shearing,
She with her scents, and essences, and cosmetics,
And all the devilries of modern fashion.
Not a bad housekeeper though—I will say that—
For she kept open house. "Madam," said I,
Showing her one day my old coat with a hole in't,
By way of parable,—"this can't last long."

Slave (*examining the lamp, which is going out*). This lamp has got no oil in it.

Str. Deuce take you,
Why did you light that thirsty beast of a lamp?
Come here, and you shall catch it.

Slave. Catch it,—why?

Str. (*boxes his ears*). For putting such a thick wick in, to be sure.—
Well,—in due time this boy of ours was born
To me and my grand lady. First of all,
We got to loggerheads about his name;
She would have something that had got a *horse* in it,—
Xanthippus—or Charippus—or Philippides;*
I was for his grandfather's name—Pheidonides.
Well, for some time we squabbled; then at last

* Names thus compounded with '*ippos*' ('horse') were much affected by the Athenian aristocracy. '*Pheidōn*,' on the other hand, in the proposed name Pheidōnides, means 'economical.'

We came to a compromise upon Pheid—ippides.
This boy—she'd take him in her lap and fondle him,
And say, "Ah! when it grows up to be a man,
It shall drive horses, like its uncle Megacles,
And wear a red cloak, it shall." Then I would say,
"He shall wear a good sheep-skin coat, like his own father,
And drive his goats to market from the farm."
But there—he never would listen to me for a moment;
He's had a horse-fever always—to my ruin.

He has thought of a scheme, however, if he can but get his son to fall in with it, by which they may both be relieved from the pressure of these debts. So he awakes young Pheidippides, and takes him into his counsels. They both walk to the front; the scene shuts, and they are outside the house. The father points to another building at the wing.

That's the great Thinking-School of our new philosophers;
There live the men who teach that heaven around us
Is a vast oven, and we the charcoal in it.*
And they teach too—for a consideration, mind—
To plead a cause and win it, right or wrong.
Ph. (*carelessly*). Who are these fellows?
Str. I don't quite remember
The name they call themselves, it's such a long one;
Very hard thinkers—but they're first-rate men.
Ph. Faugh! vulgar fellows—I know 'em. Dirty vagabonds,
Like Socrates there and Chœrephon—a low set.
Str. Pray hold your tongue—don't show your ignorance.
But, if you care at all for your old father,
Be one of them, now, do, and cut the turf.

* A caricature of the doctrine of Heraclitus, that Heat was the great principle of all things.

Ph. Not I, by Bacchus! not if you would give me
That team of Arabs that Leogoras drives.
Str. (*coaxingly*). Do, my dear boy, I beg you—go and be taught.
Ph. And what shall I learn there?
Str. Learn? (*Confidentially.*) Why, they *do* say
That these men have the secret of both Arguments,
The honest Argument (if there be such a thing) and the other;
Now this last—this false Argument, you understand—
Will make the veriest rascal win his cause.
So, if you'll go and learn for us this glorious art,
The debts I owe for you will all be cleared;
For I shan't pay a single man a farthing.
Ph. (*after a little hesitation*). No—I can't do it. Studying hard, you see,
Spoils the complexion. How could I show my face
Among the Knights, looking a beast, like those fellows?
Str. Then, sir, henceforth I swear, so help me Ceres,
I won't maintain you—you, nor your bays, nor your chestnuts.
Go to the dogs—or anywhere—out of my house!
Ph. Well, sir, I'm going. I know my uncle Megacles
Won't see me without a horse—so I don't mind.

Indignant as he is with his son, the father is determined not to lose the chance which this new science offers him of getting rid of his creditors. If his son will not learn, he will take lessons himself, old as he is; and with this resolve he knocks at the door of this "Thinking-School," the house of Socrates. One of the students comes to answer his summons—in no very good humour, for the loudness and suddenness of Strepsiades's knock has destroyed in embryo a thought which he was breeding. Still, as the old gentleman

seems an earnest disciple, he condescends to expatiate to him on the subject of some of the great master's subtle speculations; subtle in the extreme, not to say childish, but yet not very unfair caricatures of some which we find attributed to Socrates in the 'Dialogues' of Plato. Charmed with what he hears, the new scholar begs to be at once introduced. The back scene opens, and discovers the students engaged in their various investigations, with Socrates himself suspended in a kind of basket, deeply engaged in thought. The extraordinary attitude of one class of learners arrests the attention of the visitor especially:—

Str. What *are* those doing—stooping so very oddly?
Student. They probe the secrets that lie deep as Tartarus.
Str. But why—excuse me, but—their hinder quarters—
Why are they stuck so oddly up in the air?
Stud. The other end is studying astronomy
Quite independently. (*To the students, whose attention is, of course, diverted to the visitor.*) Go in, if you please!
Suppose HE comes, and catches us all idling!

But Strepsiades begs to ask a few more questions. These mathematical instruments,—what are they for?

Stud. Oh, that's geometry.
Str. And what's the use of it?
Stud. For measuring the Earth.
Str. You mean the grants
We make in the colonies to Athenian citizens?
Stud. No—*all* the Earth.
Str. A capital idea!
Divide it all?—I call that true democracy.
Stud. See, here's an outline-map of the whole world;
And here lies Athens.

Str. Athens! nay, go to—
It cannot be—I see no law-courts sitting.
Stud. 'Tis Attica, I assure you, none the less.
Str. And where's my parish, then—and my fellow-townsmen?
Stud. Oh, they're all there.—And here's Eubœa, you see,
That long strip there, stretched out along the coast.
Str. Ay—we and Pericles stretched that—pretty tight.*
But where's Lacedæmon, now?
Stud. Why, there, of course.
Str. How close to Athens! Pray, with all your thinking,
Can't ye contrive to get it further off?
Stud. (*shaking his head*). That we can't do, by Jove!
Str. Then worse luck for ye.—
But who hangs dangling in the basket yonder?
Stud. HIMSELF.
Str. And who's Himself?
Stud. Why, Socrates.
Str. Ho, Socrates!—Call him, you fellow—call loud.
Stud. Call him yourself—I've got no time for calling.
(*Exit indoors.*)
Str. Ho, Socrates! sweet, darling Socrates!
Soc. Why callest thou me, poor creature of a day?
Str. First tell me, pray, what *are* you doing up there?
Soc. I walk in air, and contemplate the sun.
Str. Oh, *that's* the way that you despise the gods—
You get so near them on your perch there—eh?
Soc. I never could have found out things divine,
Had I not hung my mind up thus, and mixed
My subtle intellect with its kindred air.
Had I regarded such things from below,

* Eubœa had revolted from its allegiance to Athens some years before this war. Pericles had swept the island with an overwhelming force, banished the chiefs of the oligarchical party, and distributed their lands amongst colonists from Athens.

I had learnt nothing. For the earth absorbs
Into itself the moisture of the brain.—
It is the very same case with water-cresses.

Str. Dear me! so water-cresses grow by thinking!

He begs Socrates to come down and help him in his difficulties. He is very anxious to learn this new Argument—that "which pays no bills." Socrates offers to introduce him to the Clouds, the new goddesses of philosophers—"great divinities to idle men;" and Strepsiades—first begging to be allowed to wrap his cloak round his head for fear of rain, having left home in his hurry without a hat—sits down to await their arrival.

(SOCRATES *chants.*)

Come, holy Clouds, whom the wise revere,
Descend in the sight of your votaries here!
Whether ye rest on the heights of Olympus,
whereon the sacred snow lies ever,
Or in coral groves of your father Ocean
ye weave with the Nymphs the dance together,
Or draw aloft in your golden vessels
the holy waters of ancient Nile,
Or haunt the banks of the lake Mæotis,
or clothe the Mimas' steeps the while,—
Hear our prayer, O gentle goddesses,
take the gifts your suppliants bring,
Smile propitious on these our offerings,
list to the mystic chant we sing!

It is not very easy to comprehend the mode in which the succeeding scene was managed, but the appliances of the Athenian stage were no doubt quite equal to presenting it very effectively. The vast amphitheatre in which these performances took place, open to the sky, and

from which actors and audience commanded a view of the hills round Athens, and of the "illimitable air" and "cloudless heaven" which Socrates apostrophises in his invocation to the goddesses, would add greatly to the effect of the beautiful choric songs which follow. But, on the other hand, it presents difficulties to any arrangement for the actual descent of the Clouds upon the stage. Probably their first chorus is sung behind the scenes, and they are invisible,—present to the imagination only of the audience, until they enter the orchestra in palpable human shape. Theories and guesses on these points are, after all, but waste of ingenuity. The beauty of the lines which herald their entrance (which can receive but scant justice in a translation) is one of the many instances in which the poet rises above the satirist.

(CHORUS OF CLOUDS, *in the distance, accompanied by the low rolling of thunder.**)

Eternal clouds!
Rise we to mortal view,
Embodied in bright shapes of dewy sheen,
Leaving the depths serene
Where our loud-sounding Father Ocean dwells,
For the wood-crownèd summits of the hills:
Thence shall our glance command
The beetling crags which sentinel the land,

* The Greek commentators inform us very particularly by what appliances thunder was imitated on the Athenian stage; either "by rolling leather bags full of pebbles down sheets of brass," or by "pouring them into a huge brazen caldron." (See note to Walsh's Aristoph., p. 302.) But Greek commentators are not to be depended upon in such matters.

The teeming earth,
The crops we bring to birth ;
Thence shall we hear
The music of the ever-flowing streams,
The low deep thunders of the booming sea.
Lo, the bright Eye of Day unwearied beams !
Shedding our veil of storms
From our immortal forms,
We scan with keen-eyed gaze this nether sphere.

Socrates falls to the ground in adoration of his beloved deities ; and Strepsiades follows his example, in great terror at the thunder, with all the buffoonish exaggeration which would delight an Athenian audience.

(CHORUS OF CLOUDS, *nearer.*)

Sisters who bring the showers,
Let us arise and greet
This glorious land, for Pallas' dwelling meet,
Rich in brave men, beloved of Cecrops old ;
Where Faith and Reverence reign,
Where comes no foot profane,
When for the mystic rites the Holy Doors unfold.
There gifts are duly paid
To the great gods, and pious prayers are said ;
Tall temples rise, and statues heavenly fair.
There, at each holy tide,
With coronals and song,
The glad processions to the altars throng ;
There, in the jocund spring,
Great Bacchus, festive king,
With dance and tuneful flute his Chorus leads along.

And now, while Socrates directs the attention of his pupil towards Mount Parnes, from whose heights he

sees (and the imagination of the audience is not slow to follow him) the ethereal goddesses descending towards the earth, the Chorus in bodily form enter the orchestra, to the sound of slow music—four-and-twenty nymphs in light cloud-like drapery. They promise, at the request of their great worshipper Socrates, to instruct his pupil in the mysterious science which is to free him from the importunity of his creditors. For these, says the philosopher, are your only true deities—Chaos, and the Clouds, and the Tongue. As to Jupiter, whom Strepsiades just ventures to mention, he is quite an exploded idea in these modern times; the great ruler of the universe is Vortex.* The machinery of the world goes on by a perpetual whirl. Socrates will, with the help of the Clouds, instruct him in all these new tenets. There is one point, however, upon which he wishes first to be satisfied—has he a good memory?

Str. 'Tis of two sorts, by Jove! remarkably good,
If a man owes me anything; of my own debts,
I'm shocked to say, I'm terribly forgetful.
Soc. Have you good natural gifts in the way of speaking?
Str. Speaking, — not much; cheating's my strongest point.

He appears to the philosopher not so very unpromising a pupil, and the pair retire into the "Thinking-shop," to begin their studies, while the Chorus make their usual address to the audience in the poet's name,

* A doctrine taught by the philosopher Anaxagoras, whose lectures Socrates is said to have attended.

touching chiefly upon topics of the day which have lost their interest for us moderns.

But the next act of the comedy brings in Socrates, swearing by all his new divinities that he never met with so utterly hopeless a pupil, in the whole course of his experience, as this very late learner, who has no one qualification for a sophist except his want of honesty. He puts him through a quibbling catechism on the stage about measures, and rhythms, and grammar, all which he declares are necessary preliminaries to the grand science which Strepsiades desires to learn, although the latter very naïvely remonstrates against this superfluous education: he wants to learn neither music nor grammar, but simply how to defeat his creditors. At last his instructor gets out of patience, and kicks him off the philosophical premises as a hopeless dunce. By the advice of the Clouds the rejected candidate goes in search of his son, to attempt once more to persuade him to enter the schools, and learn the art which has proved too difficult for his father's duller faculties.

One step, indeed, the old gentleman has made in his education; he swears no more by Jupiter, and rebukes his son, when he does so, for entertaining such very old-world superstitions; somewhat to the astonishment of that elegant young gentleman, whose opinions (if he has any on such subjects) are not so far advanced in the way of scepticism. The latter is, however, at last persuaded to become his father's substitute as the pupil of Socrates, though not without a warning on the young man's part that he may one day come to rue it. On this head the father has no misgivings, but

introduces him to the philosopher triumphantly as a scholar who is sure to do him credit—he was always a remarkable child :—

He was so very clever always, naturally ;
When he was but so high, now, he'd build mud houses,
Cut out a boat, make a cart of an old shoe,
And frogs out of pomegranate-stones—quite wonderful !*

And Socrates, after a sneer at the young gentleman's fashionable lisp, admits him as a pupil, and undertakes to instruct him in this "new way of paying old debts."

The choral ode which must have divided this scene from the next is lost. The dialogue which follows, somewhat abruptly as we now have the play, is but another version of the well-known "Choice of Hercules" between Virtue and Vice, by the sophist Prodicus—known probably to the audience of the day as well as to ourselves. The Two Arguments, the Just and the Unjust, now appear upon the stage in character ; one in the grave dress of an elder citizen, the other as a young philosopher of the day.† It is very probable that they wore masks which would be recognised by the audience as caricatures of real persons ; it has been suggested,

* A hit, no doubt, at theories of education which were in fashion then, and which have been revived in modern days. Plato, in his treatise on Legislation, advises that the child who is intended for an architect should be encouraged to build toy-houses, the future farmer to make little gardens, &c.—(De Leg., i. 643.)

† Some of the old commentators say that the disputants were brought upon the stage in the guise of game-cocks ; but there are no allusions in the dialogue to justify such an interpretation of the scene.

of Æschylus and Euripides, or of Thrasymachus the sophist, and of Aristophanes himself. What is certain is, that they represent the old and new style of training and education: and they set forth the claims of their respective systems in a long discussion, in which each abuses the other with the utmost licence of Athenian comedy. Yet there are passages of great simplicity and beauty here and there, in the speeches of the worthier claimant. The Unjust Argument, confident in the popularity of his system and his powers of argument, permits his rival to set his claims before the audience first. He proceeds to speak of the days when justice, temperance, and modesty were in fashion; when the Athenian youth were a hardy and a healthy race, not languid and effeminate as now; and he calls upon young Pheidippides to choose for himself the principles and the training which "had made the men of Marathon:"—

Cast in thy lot, O youth, with me, and choose the better paths—
So shalt thou hate the Forum's prate, and shun the lazy baths;
Be shamed for what is truly shame, and blush when shame is said,
And rise up from thy seat in hall before the hoary head;
Be duteous to thy parents, to no base act inclined,
But keep fair Honour's image deep within thine heart enshrined;
And speak no rude irreverent word against the father's years,
Whose strong hand led thine infant steps, and dried thy childhood's tears.

But the arguments of the evil counsellor are many and

plausible. What good, he argues, have men ever gained by justice, continence, and moderation? For one poor instance which his opponent can adduce of virtue being rewarded upon earth, the fluent sophist quotes a dozen against him of those who have made their gain by the opposite qualities. Honesty is *not* the best policy among mortals; and most assuredly the moral virtues receive no countenance from the example of the gods. Sophistical as the argument is, and utterly unfair as we know it to be if intended to represent the real teaching of Socrates, the satirist seems to have been fully justified in his representation so far as some of the popular lecturers of the day were concerned. The arguments which Plato, in his 'Republic,' has put into the mouth of the sophist Thrasymachus—that justice is really only the good of *others*, while injustice is more profitable to a man's self—that those who abuse injustice do so "from the fear of suffering it, not from the fear of doing it"—that justice is merely "an obedience yielded by the weak to the orders of the strong,"—do but express in grave philosophical language the same principles which Aristophanes here exaggerates in the person of his devil's advocate.* This latter winds up the controversy by plying his antagonist with a few categorical questions, quite in the style of Socrates:—

* See Plato's Republic, Book I. Of course it must be remembered that we have here only the representation of Thrasymachus's teaching as given by an opponent. As Mr Grote fairly remarks: "How far the real Thrasymachus may have argued in the slashing and offensive style here described, we have no means of deciding."—Grote's Plato, i. 145.

Unjust A. Come now,—from what class do our lawyers spring?

Just A. Well—from the blackguards.

Unj. A. I believe you. Tell me
Again, what are our tragic poets?

Just A. Blackguards.

Unj. A. Good; and our public orators?

Just A. Blackguards all.

Unj. A. D'ye see now, how absurd and utterly worthless
Your arguments have been? And now look round—
(*turning to the audience*)
Which class amongst our friends here seems most numerous?

Just A. I'm looking.

Unj. A. Well;—now tell me what you see.

Just. A. (*after gravely and attentively examining the rows of spectators*). The blackguards have it, by a large majority.

There's one, I know—and yonder there's another—
And there, again, that fellow with long hair.

And amidst the roars of delighted laughter with which the Athenian "gallery" would be sure to receive this sally of buffoonery, the advocate of justice and morality declares that he throws up his brief, and joins the ranks of the dissolute majority.

The creditors of Strepsiades have not been quiescent meanwhile. We find him, in the next scene, calculating with dismay that it wants but five days to the end of the month, when debts and interest must be paid, or legal proceedings will be taken. He is come to the School, to inquire how his son gets on with his studies. Socrates assures him that his education is quite complete; that he is now furnished with a mode of argument which will win any lawsuit, and get him off

scot-free of all liabilities, even in the teeth of a thousand witnesses who could prove the debt. He presents the youth to his father, who is charmed at first sight with the change in his complexion, which has now the genuine disputatious tint. He looks, as Strepsiades declares, "all negations and contradictions," and has the true Attic expression in his face. The father takes him home rejoicing, and awaits confidently the summons of his creditors.

The devices with which the claimants are put off by the new learning of Pheidippides, turn so entirely on the technical expressions of Athenian law, that they have little interest for an English reader. Suffice it to say that the unfortunate tradesmen with whom this young gentleman has run up bills for his horses and chariots do not seem likely to get their money. But the training which he has received in the "Thinking-shop" has some other domestic results which the father did not anticipate. He proceeds, on some slight quarrel (principally because he will quote Euripides, whom his father abominates), to cudgel the old gentleman, and further undertakes to justify his conduct on the plea that when he was a child his father had often cudgelled *him*.

Strep. Ay. but I did it for your good.
Pheid. No doubt;
And pray am I not also right to show
Goodwill to you—if beating means goodwill?
Why should your back escape the rod, I ask you,
Any more than mine did? was not I, forsooth,
Born like yourself a free Athenian?

Perhaps you will say, beating's the rule for children ;
I answer, that an old man's twice a child ;
And it is fair the old should have to howl
More than poor children, when they get into mischief,
Because there's ten times less excuse for the old ones.

Strep. There never was a law to beat one's father.

Pheid. Law ? pray who made the law ? a man, I suppose,
Like you or me, and so persuaded others :
Why have not I as good a right as he had
To start a law for future generations
That sons should beat their fathers in return ?
We shall be liberal, too, if all the stripes
You laid upon us before the law was made
We make you a present of, and don't repay them.
Look at young cocks, and all the other creatures,—
They fight their fathers ; and what difference is there
'Twixt them and us—save that they don't make laws ?

The unlucky father finds himself quite unprepared with any reply to these ingenious arguments. Too late he begins to see that this new liberal education has its inconvenient side. He protests it would have been better for him to allow his son to go on driving four-in-hand to his heart's content, than to become so subtle a philosopher. The only comfort which the young student offers him is the assurance that he is quite as ready to beat his mother, if occasion should arise ; but it is much to the credit of domestic relations at Athens that, although the old gentleman has complained of his wife, in the earlier part of the play, as having been the cause of all his present difficulties, he shows no desire to accept this kind of consolation. He curses Socrates, and appeals to the Clouds, who, he complains, have terribly misled him. The Chorus

reply with truth that the fault was his own; he had sought to be instructed in the school of Injustice, and the teaching has recoiled deservedly on his own head. But he has his revenge. Summoning his slaves, he bids them bring ladders and mattocks, and storm the stronghold of these charlatans and atheists. He mounts the roof himself, torch in hand, and proceeds to set fire to the timbers. When the students rush to the window in dismay to ask what he means by it, he tells them mockingly he is only

Holding a subtle disputation with the rafters.

Socrates is at length aroused from his lucubrations, and inquires what he is doing up there. Strepsiades retorts upon him his own explanation of his position in the hanging basket—

I walk in air, and contemplate the sun.

And the piece concludes with a grand tableau of the Thinking-school in flames, and Socrates and his pupils shrieking half-smothered from the windows.

The comedy, as has been said above,* was not so far successful as to obtain for its author either the first or second place in the award of the judges; Cratinus being placed first with his comedy of 'The Bottle'—the child of his old age—and Ameipsias second. It has been thought necessary to account for this on other grounds than the respective merits of the three pieces; though, as we are not in possession of the text of either of the others, we have no means of ascertaining how far the

* See p. 8.

award was or was not an honest one. It has been suggested by some critics, that 'The Clouds' was *too* clever for the audience, who preferred a coarser article; and indeed (unless the two gamecocks were produced upon the stage) the jests are more intellectual than practical, and the comic "business" has little of that uproarious fun with which some of the other plays abound. The author himself, as would appear from some expressions put into the mouth of the Chorus in his subsequent comedy of 'The Wasps,' was of opinion that his finer fancies had been in this case thrown away upon an unsympathetic public. Another explanation which has been given is, that the glaring offence with which the character of Socrates is represented by the audience—a supposition which is with it a compliment to their principles which it is very doubtful whether they deserved, and which the author himself would have been very slow to credit them. There is a story that the result was brought about by the influence of Alcibiades, who had been already severely satirised in the poet's comedy of 'The Revellers,' and who felt that the character of Pheidippides—his extravagance and love of horses, his connection by his mother's side with the great house of Megacles, his relation to Socrates as pupil, and even the lisping pronunciation which his teacher notices *—were all intended to be caricatures of himself, which seems by no means improbable; and that he and friends accordingly exerted themselves to prevent the poet's success.

* See p. 92.

It is not probable that the broader caricature of the great philosopher, any more than that of Cleon in 'The Knights,' had any special effect upon the popularity of its object. The story told by Ælian, that the subsequent condemnation of Socrates was due in great measure to the prejudice raised against him by this comedy, has been long refuted by the observation that it at least did not take place until more than twenty years after the performance. A traditionary anecdote of a very different kind, though resting upon not much better authority, has more of probability about it,— that the philosopher himself, having been made aware of what was in store for him, took his place among the audience at the representation, and laughed as heartily as any of them: nay, that he even rose and mounted upon a bench, in order that the strangers in the house to whom his person was previously unknown might see how admirable a counterpart the stage Socrates was of the original.

CHAPTER V.

THE WASPS.

THIS comedy, which was produced by its author the year after the performance of 'The Clouds,' may be taken as in some sort a companion picture to that piece. Here the satire is directed against the passion of the Athenians for the excitement of the law-courts, as in the former its object was the new philosophy. And as the younger generation—the modern school of thought—were there the subjects of the caricature, so here the older citizens, who took their seats in court as jurymen day by day, to the neglect of their private affairs and the encouragement of a litigious disposition, appear in their turn in the mirror which the satirist holds up. It is calculated that in the ten courts at Athens, when all were open, there might sometimes be required as many as six thousand jurymen, and there was never any difficulty in obtaining them. It was not the mere temptation of the "threepence," more or less, to which each juryman was entitled as compensation for his loss of time, which drew so many to the courts, however convenient it might be for the purposes of

burlesque to assume that it was so. No doubt the pay was an object to some of the poorer citizens; and so far the influence of such a regulation was bad, inasmuch as it led to the juries being too often struck from an inferior class, less independent and less intelligent. Nor need we be so uncharitable as the historian Mitford, and calculate that "besides the pay, which was small, there was the hope of bribes, which might be large." It is not probable that bribery could often be applied to so numerous a body. But the sense of dignity and personal importance which attaches to the right of giving a judicial decision, and the interest and excitement which are aroused by legal or criminal questions, especially in those who have to investigate them, are feelings perfectly well understood in our days, as well as in those of Aristophanes. Such feelings are not only natural, but have their use, more especially when the cause to be decided is, as it so often was at Athens, of a public character. Plato considered that a citizen who took no interest in these duties made himself a kind of alien in the state, and we Englishmen hold very much the same doctrine. But the passion for hearing and deciding questions, judicial or political, was carried to great excess among the Athenians at this date. Their own historians and orators are full of references to this national peculiarity, and Aristophanes is not the only satirist who has taken advantage of it. Lucian, in one of his very amusing dialogues, represents Menippus as looking down from the moon upon the earth below, and watching the various pursuits of the inhabitants. The northern

hordes are fighting, the Egyptian is ploughing, the Phœnician is carrying his merchandise over the sea, the Spartan is undergoing corporal discipline, and the Athenian is "sitting in the jury-box." *

This is perhaps the least amusing of all Aristophanes's productions to a modern reader, although it was adopted by Racine as the basis of his only comedy, "Les Plaideurs." There are but two characters in it of any importance to the action, a father and son. Philocleon,† the father, is strongly possessed with this mania for the courts. His family cannot keep him at home. He neglects his person, hardly sleeps at night for thinking of his duties in the courts, and is off before daylight in the morning to secure a good seat; he even declares the cock must have been bribed, by some profligates who have reason to dread the terrors of the law, not to crow loud enough to awake him. He keeps in his house "a whole beach" of little round pebbles, that he may always have one ready for giving his vote; and goes about holding his three fingers pinched together as if he had got one between them ready to slip into the ballot-box. In vain has his son remonstrated, and had him washed and dressed, and sent for the physicians, and even the priests, to try to rid him of his malady. And now, as a last resource, they have been obliged to lock him up, and set a

* Dialog. Icaro-Menippus.

† The names in the Greek are significant. "Philocleon" means "friend of Cleon" (who represents litigation, as he does most other things which are bad, in the view of Aristophanes); "Bdelycleon," the name of the son, means "hater of Cleon."

watch upon the house. His contrivances to escape are in the very wildest vein of extravaganza. He tries to get out through the chimney, and pretends he's "only the smoke;" and they all rush to put a cover on the chimney-top, and a great stone on it. He escapes through a hole in the tiles and sits on the roof, pretending to be "only a sparrow;" and they have to set a net to catch him. His son—a young gentleman of the more modern school—and the two slaves who are set to watch him day and night, have a very trying time of it.

The second scene introduces the Chorus of the play, consisting of Philocleon's fellow-jurymen. The time is early daybreak, and they are already on their way to the courts, preceded by two or three boys with torches. Their appearance is of the strangest, — they are the "Wasps" who give the name to the piece. A mask resembling a wasp's head, a black and yellow body, and some comic appendage in their rear to represent a sting,—were, we may presume, the costume provided by the stage manager. The poet probably intended to represent the acrimonious temper which delighted in the prosecution of individuals without much reference to their actual guilt, and the malevolence which often instigated the accusation. But he allows them to give, on their own behalf, another and more honourable explanation of their name, which, though it occurs later in the play, may find its place here. It is the old story, which the dramatist knew his audience were never tired of hearing:—

If any of this good company should note our strange
array—
The wasp-like waists and cross-barred suits that we have
donned to-day—
And if he asks what means this sting we brandish, as you
see,
Him will we undertake to teach, dull scholar though he be
All we who wear this tail-piece claim true Athenian birth
The rightful Aborigines, sole sons of Mother earth ;*
A lusty race, who struck good blows for Athens in the fight,
What time as the Barbarian came on us like the night.
With torch and brand the Persian horde swept on from
east to west,
To storm the hives that we had stored, and smoke us from
our nest:
Then we laid our hand to spear and targe, and met him on
his path ;
Shoulder to shoulder, close we stood, and bit our lips for
wrath.
So fast and thick the arrows flew, that none might see the
heaven,
But the gods were on our side that day, and we bore them
back at even.
High o'er our heads, an omen good, we saw the owlet wheel,
And the Persian trousers in their backs felt the good Attic
steel.
Still as they fled we followed close, a swarm of vengeful
foes,
And stung them where we chanced to light, on cheek, and
lip, and nose.
So to this day, barbarians say, when whispered far or near,
More than all else the Attic WASP is still a name of fear.

* The Athenians affected to wear a golden grasshopper in their hair, as being "sprung from the soil."

The party are come, as usual, to summon their trusty comrade Philocleon to go with them to the courts. What makes him so late this morning? He was never wont to be the last on these occasions. They knock at the door, and call him loudly by name. He puts his head out of the window, and begging them not to make such a noise for fear they should awake his guard, explains to them his unfortunate case. He will try to let himself down to the street by a rope, if they will catch him,—and if he should fall and break his neck, they must promise to bury him with all professional honours "within the bar." But he is discovered in the attempt by one of the watchful slaves, and thrust back again.

Then the leader of the Chorus, a veteran Wasp who has seen service, cheers on his troops to the attack of the fortress in which their comrade is so unjustifiably confined. He reminds them of the exploits of their youth :—

Forward, good friends—advance! Quick march!—Now, Comias, why so slow, man?
There was a day when I may say you and I gave way to no man;
Then you were as tough as dog's hide—now Charínades moves faster!
Ha! Strymodórus! in the Courts 'twere hard to find your master!
Where's Chabes? and Euérgides?—do any of ye know?—
Alack! alack! for the young blood that warmed us long ago!
Dost mind when at Byzantium we two kept watch together,
And walked our rounds at night, old boy, in that tremendous weather?

And how we stole the kneading-trough from that old
baker's wife,
Split it, and fried our rations with it?—Ha, ha!—Ay,
that was life!

Shakspeare had assuredly never read 'The Wasps;' but the mixture of the farcical with the pathetic which always accompanies the garrulous reminiscences of old age, and which Aristophanes introduces frequently in his comedies, is common to both these keen observers. In the comrades of the old Athenian's youth we seem to recognise Master Shallow's *quondam* contemporaries: "There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barr, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cotswold man,—you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the Inns of Court again. . . . O the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of my old acquaintance are dead!" *

A battle-royal takes place on the stage; the Wasps, with their formidable stings, trying to storm the house, while the son and his retainers defend their position with clubs and other weapons, and especially by raising a dense smoke, which is known to be very effective against such an enemy.

The Wasps are driven back, and the old gentleman and his son agree upon a compromise. Bdelycleon promises, on condition that his father will no longer attend the public trials, to establish a little private tribunal for him at home. He shall there take cognisance of all domestic offences; with this great advantage, that if it rains or snows he can hold his courts with-

* K. Henry IV., Pt. ii., act iii. sc. 2.

out being obliged to turn out of doors. And—a point on which the old gentleman makes very particular inquiries—his fee shall be paid him every day as usual. On these terms, with the approval of the Chorus, the domestic truce is concluded.

It seems doubtful, however, whether the household will supply sufficient business for the court. They are thinking of beginning with an unlucky Thracian slave-girl who has burnt a sauce-pan, when most opportunely one of the other slaves rushes on the stage in hot pursuit of the house-dog Labés, who has run off with a piece of Sicilian cheese.* The son determines to bring this as the first case before his father, and a mock trial ensues, in which all the appliances and forms of a regular court of justice are absurdly travestied. Another dog appears in the character of prosecutor, and he is allowed to bring the accusation forward through Xanthias, one of the slaves. The indictment is drawn in due form, and the counsel for the prosecution urges in aggravation that the prisoner had refused to give the other dog, his client, a share of it. Philocleon, with a contempt for the ordinary formalities of law which would greatly shock the modern profession, is very much disposed to convict the delinquent Labes at once, on the evidence of his own senses: he stinks of cheese disgustingly, in the very nostrils of the court, at this present moment. But his son recalls him to a sense of the proprieties,

* There is a political allusion here to the conduct of Laches, (whose name is slightly modified), an Athenian admiral accused at the time of taking bribes in Sicily.

and undertakes to be counsel for the defence. He calls as witnesses the cheesegrater, the brazier, and other utensils, to prove that a good deal of the said cheese had been used in the kitchen. He lays stress also on poor Labes's previous good character as a house-dog; and pleads that, even if he has pilfered in this instance, it is entirely owing to "a defective education." The whole scene reads very much like a chapter out of one of those modern volumes of clever nursery tales, which are almost too clever for the children for whom they are professedly intended. The Athenian audience did in fact resemble children in many points—only children of the cleverest kind. The advocate winds up with one of those visible appeals *ad misericordiam* which were common at the Athenian as subsequently at the Roman bar, and which even Cicero did not disdain to make use of—the production of the unhappy family of the prisoner. The puppies are brought into court, and set up such a lamentable yelping that Philocleon desires they may be removed at once.* He shows, as his son thinks, some tokens of relenting towards the prisoner. He moves towards the ballot-boxes, and asks which is the one for the condemning

* This scene has been borrowed by Racine (Les Plaideurs, act iii. sc. 3.) The French dramatist has added, as to the behaviour of the puppies in court, a touch of his own which is very Aristophanic indeed. Ben Jonson has also adapted the idea in his play of 'The Staple of News' (act v. sc. 2), where he makes the miser Pennyboy sit in judgment on his two dogs. It is somewhat surprising that two such authors should have considered an incident which, after all, is not so very humorous, worth making prize of.

votes. The son shows him the wrong one, and into that he drops his vote. He has acquitted the dog by mistake, and faints away when he finds out what he has done — he has never given a vote for acquittal before in his life, and cannot forgive himself. And with this double stroke at the bitter spirit of an Athenian jury and at the ballot-box, the action of the comedy, according to our notions of dramatic fitness, might very properly end.

So strongly does one of the ablest English writers upon Aristophanes, Mr Mitchell, feel this, that in his translation he here divides the comedy, and places the remaining portion in a sequel, to which he gives the title of "The Dicast turned Gentleman." Philocleon has been persuaded by his son to renounce his old habits of life, and to become more fashionable in his dress and conversation; but the new pursuits to which he betakes himself are scarcely so respectable as his old ones. His son, after a few lessons on modern conversation and deportment, takes him out to a dinner-party, where he insults the guests, beats the servants, and from which he returns in the last scene very far from sober, and not in the best possible company. He is followed by some half-dozen complainants, male and female, whom he has cudgelled in the streets on his way home; and when they threaten to "take the law" of him, he laughs uproariously at the old-fashioned notion. Law-courts, he assures them, are quite obsolete. In vain his son remonstrates with him upon his outrageous proceedings; he bids the "old lawyer," as he calls him, get out of his way. So that we have

here the counterpart to the conclusion of 'The Clouds:' as, in the former play, young Pheidippides gives up the turf, at his father's request, only to become a word-splitting philosopher and an undutiful son; so here the father is weaned from the law-courts, and persuaded to mix in more refined society, only to turn out a "grey iniquity" like Falstaff. The moral, if there be one, is somewhat hard to find. It may possibly be contained in a few words of the Chorus, which speak of the difficulty and the danger of a sudden change in all the habits of a man's life. Or is it necessary always for the writer of burlesques, any more than for the poet, to supply his audience with any moral at all? Might it not be quite enough to have raised a laugh at the absurd termination of the son's attempt to reform the father, and the tendency of all new converts to run into extremes?

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRDS.

'THE Birds' of Aristophanes, though one of the longest of his comedies, and one which evidently stood high in the estimation of the author himself, has comparatively little interest for a modern reader. Either the burlesque reads to us, as most modern burlesques assuredly would, comparatively poor and spiritless without the important adjuncts of music, scenery, dresses, and what we call the "spectacle" generally, which we know to have been in this instance on the most magnificent scale; or the points in the satire are so entirely Athenian, and directed to the passing topics of the day, that the wit of the allusions is now lost to us. Probably there is also a deeper political meaning under what appears otherwise a mere fantastical trifling; and this is the opinion of some of the best modern critics. It may be, as Süvern thinks, that the great Sicilian expedition, and the ambitious project of Alcibiades for extending the Athenian empire, form the real point of the play; easily enough apprehended by contemporaries, but become obscure

to us. This is no place to discuss a question upon which even professed scholars are not agreed; but all these causes may contribute to make us incompetent judges of the effect of the play upon those who saw it acted. It failed, however, to secure the first prize that year: the author was again beaten by Ameipsias—a specimen of whose comedies one would much like to see.

Two citizens of Athens, Peisthetærus and Euelpides —names which we may, perhaps, imperfectly translate into "Plausible" and "Hopeful"—disgusted at the state of things in Athens both politically and socially, have set out in search of some hitherto undiscovered country where there shall be no lawsuits and no informers. They have hired as guides a raven and a jackdaw—who give a good deal of trouble on the road by biting and scratching—and are at last led by them to the palace of the King of the Birds, formerly King Tereus of Thrace, but changed, according to the mythologists, into the Hoopoe, whose magnificent crest is a very fit emblem of his royalty. His wife is Procne—"the Nightingale"—daughter of a mythical king of Attica, so that, in fact, he may be considered as a national kinsman. The royal porter, the Trochilus, is not very willing to admit the visitors, looking upon them as no better than a couple of bird-catchers; but the Bird-king himself receives them, when informed of their errand, with great courtesy, though he does not see how he can help them. But can they possibly want a finer city than Athens? No—but some place more quiet and comfortable. But why, he asks, should they apply to him?

"Because you were a man, the same as us;
And found yourself in debt, the same as us;
And did not like to pay, the same as us;
And after that you changed into a bird,
And ever since have flown and wandered far
Over the land and seas, and have acquired
All knowledge that a bird or man can learn."—(F.)

The adventurers do not learn much, however, from the Hoopoe. But an original idea strikes Peisthetærus —why not build a city up here, in the region of the Birds, the mid atmosphere between earth and heaven? If the Hoopoe and his subjects will but follow his advice, they will thus hold the balance of power in the universe.

"From that position you'll command mankind,
And keep them in utter thorough subjugation,—
Just as you do the grasshoppers and locusts;
And if the gods offend you, you'll blockade them,
And starve them to surrender."—(F.)

The king summons a public meeting of his subjects to consider the proposal of their human visitors; and no doubt the appearance of the Chorus in their grotesque masks and elaborate costumes, representing twenty-four birds of various species, from the flamingo to the woodpecker, would be hailed with great delight by an Athenian audience, who in these matters were very much like grown-up children. The music appears to have been of a very original character, and more elaborate than usual; and the part of the Nightingale, with solos on the flute behind the scenes, is said to have been taken by a female performer of great ability, a

public favourite who had just returned to Athens after a long absence. But the mere words of a comic extravaganza, whether Greek or English, without the accompaniments, on which so much depends, are little better than the dry skeleton of the piece, and can convey but a very inadequate idea of its attractions when fittingly "mounted" on the stage. This is notably the case with this production of our author, which, from its whole character, must have depended very much upon the completeness of such accessories for its success.

The Birds are at first inclined to receive their human visitors as hereditary and notorious enemies. "Men were deceivers ever," is their song, in so many words; and it requires all the king's influence to keep them from attacking them and killing them at once. At length they agree to a parley, and Peisthetærus begins by paying some ingenious compliments to the high respectability and antiquity of the feathered race. Was not the cock once king of the Persians? is he not still called the "Persian bird"? and still even to this day, the moment he crows, do not all men everywhere jump out of bed and go to their work? And was not the cuckoo king of Egypt; and still when they hear him cry "cuckoo!" do not all the Egyptians go into the harvest-fields? Do not kings bear eagles and doves now on their sceptres, in token of the true sovereignty of the Birds? Is not Jupiter represented always with his eagle, Minerva with her owl, Apollo with his hawk? But now,—he goes on to say—"men hunt you, and trap you, and set you out for sale, and,

not content with simply roasting you, they actually pour scalding sauce over you,—oil, and vinegar, and grated cheese,—spoiling your naturally exquisite flavour." But, if they will be advised by him, they will bear it no longer. If men will still prefer the gods to the birds, then let the rooks and sparrows flock down and eat up all the seed-wheat—and let foolish mortals see what Ceres can then do for them in the way of supplies. And let the crows peck out the eyes of the sheep and oxen; and let them see whether Apollo (who calls himself a physician, and takes care to get his fees as such) will be able to heal them. [Euelpides here puts in a word—he hopes they will allow him first to sell a pair of oxen he has at home.] And indeed the Birds will make much better gods, and more economical: there will be no need of costly marble temples, and expensive journeys to such places as Ammon and Delphi; an oak-tree or an olive-grove will answer all purposes of bird-worship.

He then propounds his great scheme for building a bird-city in mid-air. The idea is favourably entertained, and the two featherless bipeds are equipped (by means of some potent herb known to the Bird-king) with a pair of wings apiece, to make them presentable in society, before they are introduced at the royal table. The metamorphosis causes some amusement, and the two human travellers are not complimentary as to each other's appearance in these new appendages; Peisthetærus declaring that his friend reminds him of nothing so much as "a goose on a

cheap sign-board," while the other retorts by comparing him to "a plucked blackbird."*

The Choral song that follows is one of the gems of that elegance of fancy and diction which, here and there, in the plays of Aristophanes, almost startle us by contrast with the broad farce which forms their staple, and show that the author possessed the powers of a true poet as well as of a clever satirist.

"Ye children of man! whose life is a span,
Protracted with sorrow from day to day,
Naked and featherless, feeble and querulous,
Sickly calamitous creatures of clay!
Attend to the words of the sovereign birds,
Immortal, illustrious lords of the air,
Who survey from on high, with a merciful eye,
Your struggles of misery, labour, and care.
Whence you may learn and clearly discern
Such truths as attract your inquisitive turn;
Which is busied of late with a mighty debate,

* If the reader would like to see how thoroughly this kind of humour is in the spirit of modern burlesque, he cannot do better than glance at Mr Planché's "Birds of Aristophanes," produced at the Haymarket in 1846. This is his free version of the passage just noticed—('Tomostyleron' and 'Jackanoxides' are the two adventurers of the Greek comedy):—

"*King of Birds.* And what bird will you be—a popinjay?
Tom. No, no; they pop at him. (*To Jack.*) What kind would you be?
King (*aside*). The bird you're most akin to is a booby.
Jack. For fear of accidents, some fowl I'd be,
That folks don't shoot or eat.
Tom. Humph! let me see—
There may be one I never heard the name of.
King (*aside*). You can't be anything they won't make *game* of."

A profound speculation about the creation,
And organical life, and chaotical strife,
With various notions of heavenly motions,
And rivers and oceans, and valleys and mountains,
And sources of fountains, and meteors on high,
And stars in the sky. . . . We propose by-and-by
(If you'll listen and hear) to make it all clear."—(F.)

There follows here some fantastical cosmogony, showing how all things had their origin from a mystic egg, laid by Night, from which sprang the golden-winged Eros—Love, the great principle of life, whose offspring were the Birds.

"Our antiquity proved, it remains to be shown
That Love is our author and master alone;
Like him we can ramble and gambol and fly
O'er ocean and earth, and aloft to the sky:
And all the world over, we're friends to the lover,
And where other means fail, we are found to prevail,
When a peacock or pheasant is sent as a present.
All lessons of primary daily concern
You have learnt from the birds, and continue to learn,
Your best benefactors and early instructors;
We give you the warning of seasons returning;
When the cranes are arranged, and muster afloat
In the middle air, with a creaking note,
Steering away to the Lybian sands,
Then careful farmers sow their lands;
The crazy vessel is hauled ashore,
The sail, the ropes, the rudder, and oar
Are all unshipped, and housed in store.
The shepherd is warned, by the kite reappearing,
To muster his flock, and be ready for shearing.
You quit your old cloak at the swallow's behest,
In assurance of summer, and purchase a vest.

For Delphi, for Ammon, Dodona, in fine
For every oracular temple and shrine,
The birds are a substitute equal and fair,
For on us you depend, and to us you repair
For counsel and aid when a marriage is made,
A purchase, a bargain, a venture in trade:
Unlucky or lucky, whatever has struck ye—
An ox or an ass that may happen to pass,
A voice in the street, or a slave that you meet,
A name or a word by chance overheard—
If you deem it an omen, you call it a *bird;*
And if birds are your omens, it clearly will follow
That birds are a proper prophetic Apollo."—(F.)

The Birds proceed at once to build their new city. Peisthetærus prefers helping with his head rather than his hands, but he orders off his simple-minded companion to assist them in the work.

Peis. Come now, go aloft, my boy, and tend the masons;
Find them good stones; strip to it, like a man,
And mix the mortar; carry up the hod—
And tumble down the ladder, for a change.
Set guards over the wall; take care of fire;
Go your rounds with the bell as city watchman—
And go to sleep on your post—as I know you will.
Euelp. (*sulkily*). And you stay here and be hanged, if you like—there, now!
Peis. (*winking at the King*). Go! there's a good fellow, go! upon my word,
They couldn't possibly get on without you.

The building is completed, by the joint exertions of the Birds, in a shorter time than even the enthusiastic speculations of Peisthetærus had calculated:—

"*Messenger.* There came a body of thirty thousand cranes
(I won't be positive, there might be more)
With stones from Africa in their craws and gizzards,
Which the stone-curlews and stone-chatterers
Worked into shape and finished. The sand-martins
And mudlarks too were busy in their department,
Mixing the mortar; while the water-birds,
As fast as it was wanted, brought the water,
To temper and work it.
Peis. (*in a fidget*). But who served the masons?
Who did you get to carry it?
Mess. To carry it?
Of course the *carrion* crows and carrier-pigeons." *—(F.)

The geese with their flat feet trod the mortar, and the pelicans with their saw-bills were the carpenters. The name fixed upon for this new metropolis is "Cloud-Cuckoo-Town"—the first recorded "castle in the air." It must be the place, Euelpides thinks, where some of those great estates lie which he has heard certain friends of his in Athens boast of. It appears to be indeed a very unsubstantial kind of settlement; for Iris, the messenger of the Immortals, who has been despatched from heaven to inquire after the arrears of sacrifice, quite unaware of its existence and its purpose, dashes through the airy blockade immediately after its building. She is pursued, however, by a detachment of light cavalry—hawks, falcons, and eagles—and brought upon the stage as prisoner, in a state of great wrath at

* The play on the names is, of course, not the same in the Greek as in the English. Mr Frere has perhaps managed it as well as it could be done.

the indignity put upon her,—wrath which is by no means mollified by the sarcasms of Peisthetærus on the flaunting style and very pronounced colours of her costume as goddess of the Rainbow.

The men seem well inclined to the new ruling powers, and many apply at once to be furnished with wings. But the state of things in the celestial regions soon gets so intolerable, owing to the stoppage of all communication with earth and its good things, that certain barbarian deities, the gods of Thrace, who are—as an Athenian audience would readily understand—of a very carnal and ill-mannered type, break out into open rebellion, and threaten mutiny against the supremacy of Jupiter, unless he can come to some terms with this new intermediate power. Information of this movement is brought by Prometheus—here, as in the tragedians, the friend of man and the enemy of Jupiter—who comes secretly to Peisthetærus (getting under an umbrella, that Jupiter may not see him) and advises him on no account to come to any terms with that potentate which do not include the transfer into his possession of the fair Basileia (sovereignty), who rules the household of Olympus, and is the impersonation of all good things that can be desired. In due time an embassy from the gods in general arrives at the new city, sent to treat with the Birds. The Commissioners are three: Neptune, Hercules (whose appetite for good things was notorious, and who would be a principal sufferer by the cutting off the supplies), and a Thracian god—a Triballian—who talks very bad Greek indeed, and who has succeeded in some way in getting

himself named on the embassy, to the considerable disgust of Neptune, who has much trouble in making him look at all respectable and presentable.

"*Nep.* There's Nephelococcugia! that's the town,
The point we're bound to with our embassy.
(*Turning to the Triballian.*)
But you! what a figure have ye made yourself!
What a way to wear a mantle! slouching off
From the left shoulder! Hitch it round, I tell ye,
On the right side. For shame—come—so; that's better;
These folds, too, bundled up; there, throw them round
Even and easy,—so. Why, you're a savage,
A natural-born savage.—Oh, democracy!
What will it bring us to, when such a ruffian
Is voted into an embassy!
Trib. (*to Neptune, who is pulling his dress about*). Come, hands off,
Hands off!
Nep. Keep quiet, I tell ye, and hold your tongue,
For a very beast! in all my life in heaven,
I never saw such another. Hercules,
I say, what shall we do? What should you think?
Her. What would I do? what do I think? I've told you
Already—I think to throttle him—the fellow,
Whoever he is, that's keeping us blockaded.
Nep. Yes, my good friend; but we were sent, you know,
To treat for a peace. Our embassy is for peace.
Her. That makes no difference; or if it does,
It makes me long to throttle him all the more."—(F.)

Hercules, ravenous as he always is, and having been kept for some time on very short commons, is won over by the rich odour of some cookery in which he

finds Peisthetærus, now governor of the new state, employed on their arrival. He is surprised to discover that the *roti* consists of birds, until it is explained to him that they are aristocrat birds, who have, in modern phrase, been guilty of conspiring against democracy. This brief but bitter satire upon this Bird-Utopia is thrown in as it were by the way, quite casually; but one wonders how the audience received it. Hercules determines to make peace on any terms; and when Neptune seems inclined to stand upon the dignity of his order, and taunts his brother god with being too ready to sacrifice his father's rights, he draws the Triballian aside, and threatens him roundly with a good thrashing if he does not give his vote the right way. Having secured his majority of votes by this powerful argument—a kind of argument by no means peculiar to aerial controversies, but familiar alike to despots and demagogues in all times—Hercules concludes on behalf of the gods the truce with the Birds. Jupiter agrees to resign his sceptre to them, on condition that there is no further embargo on the sacrifices, and to give up to Peisthetærus the beautiful Basileia; and in the closing scene she appears in person, decked as a bride, riding in procession by the side of Peisthetærus, while the Chorus chant a half-burlesque epithalamium. "Plausible" has won the sovereignty, but of a very unsubstantial kingdom—if that be the moral of the play.

Süvern contends, in his very ingenious Essay on this comedy, that the fantastic project in which the Birds are persuaded by Peisthetærus to engage is in-

tended to represent the ultimate designs of Alcibiades in urging the expedition of the Athenians to Sicily, —no less than the subjugation of Italy, Carthage, and Libya, and obtaining the sovereignty of the Mediterranean: by which the Spartans (the gods of the comedy) would be cut off from intercourse with the smaller states, here represented by the men. He considers that in Peisthetærus we have Alcibiades, compounded with some traits of the sophist Gorgias, whose pupil he is said to have been. Iris's threat of the wrath of her father Jupiter—which certainly is more seriously worded than the general tone of the play—he takes to be a prognostication of the unhappy termination of the expedition, a feeling shared by many at Athens; while in the transfer of Basileia—all the real power—to Peisthetærus, and not to the Birds, he foreshadows the probable results of the personal ambition of Alcibiades. Such an explanation receives support from many other passages in the comedy, and is worked out by the writer with great pains and ability.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FROGS.

THE point of the satire in this comedy is chiefly critical, and directed against the tragedian Euripides, upon whom Aristophanes is never weary of showering his ridicule. There must have been something more in this than the mere desire to raise a laugh by a burlesque of a popular tragedian, or the satisfaction of a purely literary dislike. It is probable, as has been suggested, that our conservative and aristocratic author looked upon Euripides as a dangerous innovator in philosophy as well as in literature; one of the "new school" at Athens, whom he was so fond of contrasting with the "men of Marathon."

Bacchus, the patron of the drama, has become disgusted with its present state. He finds worse writers now in possession of the stage than Euripides; and he has resolved upon undertaking a journey to Tartarus, to bring him back to earth again. He would prefer Sophocles; but to get away from the dominions of Pluto requires a good deal of scheming and stratagem: and Sophocles is such a good easy man that he is pro-

bably contented where he is, while the other is such a clever, contriving fellow, that he will be sure to find some plan for his own escape. Remembering the success of Hercules on a similar expedition to the lower regions, Bacchus has determined to adopt the club and the lion's skin, in order to be taken for that hero. Followed by his slave Xanthias—who comes in riding upon an ass (a kind of classical Sancho Panza), and carrying his master's luggage—he calls upon Hercules on his way, in order to gather from him some information as to his route,—which is the best road to take, what there is worth seeing there, and especially what inns he can recommend, where the beds are reasonably clean, and free from those disagreeable bedfellows with which the Athenians of old seem to have been quite as well acquainted as any modern Londoner.

Hercules laughs to himself at the figure which his brother deity cuts in a costume so unsuited to his habits and character, and answers him in a tone of banter. Bacchus wants to know the shortest and most convenient road to the regions of the dead.

"*Her.* Well,—which shall I tell ye first, now? Let me see—
There's a good convenient road by the Rope and Noose—
The Hanging Road.
Bac. No, that's too close and stifling.
Her. Then there's an easy, fair, well-beaten track,
As you go by the Pestle and Mortar.
Bac. What, the Hemlock?
Her. To be sure.
Bac. That's much too cold,—it will never do.
They tell me it strikes a chill to the legs and feet.

Her. Should you like a speedy, rapid, downhill road?
Indeed I should, for I'm a sorry traveller.
Go to the Keramicus, then.
Bac. What then?
Her. Get up to the very top of the tower—
Bac. What then?
Her. Stand there and watch when the Race of the Torch begins;
And mind, when you hear the people cry 'Start, start!'
Then start at once with 'em.
Bac. Me? Start? Where from?
Her. From the top of the tower to the bottom.
Bac. No, not I.
It's enough to dash my brains out! I'll not go
Such a road upon any account."—(F.)

Bacchus gets the needful information at last, and sets out on his journey—not without some remonstrance from his slave as to the weight of the luggage he has to carry. Surely, Xanthias says, there must be some dead people going that way on their own account, in a conveyance, who would carry it for a trifle? His master gives him leave to make such an arrangement if he can—and as a bier is borne across the stage, Xanthias stops it, and tries to make a bargain with the occupant. The dead man asks eighteenpence; Xanthias offers him a shilling; the other replies that he "would rather come to life again," and bids his bearers "move on."

There must have been some kind of change of scene, to enable the travellers to arrive at the passage of the Styx, where Charon's ferry-boat is in waiting. He plies his trade exactly after the fashion of a modern omnibus-conductor. "Any one for Lethe, Tænarus,

the Dogs, or No-man's-Land?" "You're sure you're going straight to Hell?" asks the cautious traveller. "Certainly—to oblige you." So Bacchus steps into the boat, begging Charon to be very careful, for it seems very small and crank, as Hercules had warned him. But Charon carries no slaves—Xanthias must run round and meet them on the other side. The god takes his place at the oar, at the ferryman's bidding (but in very awkward "form," as a modern oarsman would term it), to work his passage across: and an invisible Chorus of Frogs, who give their name to the piece—the "Swans of the Marsh," as Charon calls them—chant their discordant music, in which, nevertheless, occur some very graceful lines, to the time of the stroke. It must be remembered that the oldest temple of Bacchus—the Lenæan—was known as that "In the Marsh," and it was there that the festival was held at which this piece was brought forward.

The chant of the Frogs dies away in the distance, and the scene changes to the other side of the infernal lake, where Xanthias was to await the arrival of his master. It does not seem likely that any means could have been adopted for darkening a stage which was nearly five hundred feet broad, and open to the sky: but it is plain that much of the humour of the following scene depends upon its being supposed to take place more or less in the dark. Probably the darkness was conventional, and only by grace of the audience—as indeed must be the case to some extent even in a modern theatre.

[*Enter Bacchus, on one side of the stage.*]

B. Hoy! Xanthias!—Where's Xanthias?—I say, Xanthias!

[*Enter Xanthias, on the other side.*]

X. Hallo!

B. Come here, sir,—quick!

X. Here I am, master!

B. What kind of a place is it, out yonder?

X. Dirt and darkness.

B. Did you see any of those perjurers and assassins
He told us of?

X. Aye,—lots. (*Looking round at the audience.*)
I see 'em now—don't you?

B. (*looking round*). To be sure I do, by Neptune! now I see 'em!—
What shall we do?

X. Go forward, I should say;
This is the place where lie those evil beasts—
The monsters that he talked of.

B. Oh! confound him!
He was romancing—trying to frighten me,
Knowing how bold I was—jealous, that's the fact:
Never was such a braggart as that Hercules!
I only wish I *could* fall in with something—
Some brave adventure, worthy of my visit.

X. Stop!—there!—by Jove, I heard a roar out yonder!

B. (*nervously*). Where, where?

X. Behind us.

B. (*pushing himself in front of Xanthias*). Go behind, sir, will you?

X. No—it's in front.

B. (*getting behind Xanthias again*). Why don't you go in front, then?

X. Great Jupiter! I see an awful beast!

B. What like?

X. Oh—horrible! like everything!

Now it's a bull—and now a stag—and now
A beautiful woman!

B. (*jumping from behind X., and pushing him back*). Where?—Let me go first!

X. It's not a woman now—it's a great dog!

B. (*in great terror, getting behind X. again*). Oh!—it's the Empusa! *

X. (*getting frightened*). It's got eyes like fire,
And its face all of a blaze!

B. And one brass leg?

X. Lawk-a-mercy, yes!—and a cloven foot on the other —It has indeed!

B. (*looking round in terror*). Where can I get to—tell me?

X. Where can *I* go? (*runs into a corner.*)

B. (*makes as if he would run into the arms of the Priest of Bacchus, who had a seat of honour in the front row.*)
Good priest, protect me!—take me home to supper! †

X. (*from his corner*). We're lost—we're lost! O Hercules, dear master!

B. (*in a frightened whisper*). Don't call me by that name, you fool—don't, don't!

X. Well,—Bacchus, must I say?

B. No-o!—that's worse still!

X. (*to something in the distance*). Avaunt, there! go thy ways! (*Joyfully.*) Here, master! here!

B. What is it?

X. Hurrah! take heart! we've had the greatest luck—
We can say now, in our great poet's words,—

* A sort of Night-hag belonging to Hecate, which assumed various shapes to terrify belated travellers at cross-roads.

† The priests of Bacchus had probably (and very naturally) a reputation as *bons vivants*. At all events, they gave a sumptuous official entertainment at these dramatic festivals.

"After a storm there comes a calm."—It's gone!

B. Upon your oath?

X. Upon my oath.

B. You swear it?

X. I swear it.

B. Swear again.

X. I swear—by Jupiter.

But now the sound of flutes is heard in the distance, and with music and torches, a festive procession enters the orchestra. A parody of the great Eleusinian mysteries (for even these were lawful game to the comedy-writer) introduces the true Chorus of this play, consisting of the 'Initiated,' who chant an ode, half serious half burlesque, in honour of Bacchus and Ceres. They direct the travellers to the gates of Pluto's palace, which are close at hand. Bacchus eyes the awful portal for some time before he ventures to lift the knocker, and is very anxious to announce himself in the most polite fashion. "How do people knock at doors in these parts, I wonder?"

"*Æac.* (*from within, with the voice of a royal and infernal porter*). Who's there?

Bac. (*with a forced voice*). 'Tis I,—the valiant Hercules.

Æac. (*coming out*). Thou brutal, abominable, detestable,
Vile, villanous, infamous, nefarious scoundrel!
How durst thou, villain as thou wert, to seize
Our watchdog Cerberus, whom I kept and tended,
Hurrying him off half-strangled in your grasp?
But now, be sure, we have you safe and fast,
Miscreant and villain! Thee the Stygian cliffs
With stern adamantine durance, and the rocks

Of inaccessible Acheron, red with gore,
Environ and beleaguer, and the watch
And swift pursuit of the hideous hounds of hell,
And the horrible Hydra with her hundred heads,
Whose furious ravening fangs shall rend and tear thee."
—(F.)

Before the terrible porter has ended his threats, Bacchus has dropped to the ground from sheer terror. "Hallo!" says Xanthias, "what's the matter?" "I've had an accident," says his master, recovering himself when he sees that Æacus is gone. But finding that the *rôle* of Hercules has so many unforeseen responsibilities, he begs Xanthias to change dresses and characters,—to relieve him of the club and lion's skin, while he takes his turn with the bundles. No sooner has the change been effected, than a waiting-woman of Queen Proserpine makes her appearance—she has been sent to invite Hercules to supper. She addresses herself, of course, to Xanthias:—

"Dear Hercules! so you're come at last! come in!
For the goddess, as soon as she heard of it, set to work
Baking peck-loaves, and frying stacks of pancakes,
And making messes of frumenty: there's an ox,
Besides, she has roasted whole, with a relishing stuffing."
—(F.)

There is the best of wine, besides, awaiting him—and such lovely singers and dancers!

Xanthias, after some modest refusals, allows himself to be persuaded, and prepares to follow his fair guide, bidding his master look after the luggage. But Bacchus prefers on this occasion to play the part of Hercules himself, and insists on each resuming their

original characters,—the slave warning him that he may come to rue it yet. The warning soon comes true. Before he can get to the palace, he is seized upon by a brace of infernal landladies, at whose establishments Hercules, on his previous visit, has left some little bills unpaid. "Hallo!" says one lady, "here's the fellow that ate me up sixteen loaves!" "And me a score of fried cutlets at three-halfpence apiece," says the other, "And all my garlic!" "And my pickled fish, and the new cream-cheeses, which he swallowed rush-baskets and all! and then, when I asked for payment, he only grinned and roared at me like a bull, and threatened me with his sword." "Just like him!" says Xanthias. After abusing poor Bacchus, and shaking their fists in his face, they go off to fetch some of the infernal lawyers; and Bacchus once more begs Xanthias to stand his friend, and play Hercules again, —he shall really be Hercules for the future,—the part suits him infinitely better. The slave consents, and again they change dresses, when Æacus comes in with the Plutonian police. He points out to them the representative of Hercules—"Handcuff me this fellow that stole the dog!" But Xanthias is not easily handcuffed; he stands on his defence; protests that "he wishes he may die if he was ever that way before;"—he "never touched a hair of the dog's tail." If Æacus won't believe him, there stands his slave—he may take and torture him, after the usual fashion, and see whether he can extract any evidence of guilt. This seems so fair a proposal that Æacus at once agrees to it.

"*Æac.* (*to Bac.*) Come, you—put down your bundles,
and make ready.
And mind—let me hear no lies.
Bac. I'll tell you what—
I'd advise people not to torture me;
I give you notice—I'm a deity;
So mind now—you'll have nobody to blame
But your own self.
Æac. What's that you're saying there?
Bac. Why, that I'm Bacchus, Jupiter's own son;
That fellow there's a slave (*pointing to Xanthias*).
Æac. (*to Xanthias*). Do you hear?
Xan. I hear him:
A reason the more to give him a good beating;
If he's immortal, he need never mind it."—(F.)

Æacus proceeds to test their divinity, by administering a lash to each of them in turn; but they endure the ordeal so successfully, that at last he gives it up in despair.

"By the Holy Goddess, I'm completely puzzled!
I must take you before Proserpine and Pluto—
Being gods themselves, they're likeliest to know.
Bac. Why, that's a lucky thought!—I only wish
It had happened to occur before you beat us."—(F.)

There is an interval of choral song, with a political bearing, during which we are to suppose that Bacchus is being entertained at the infernal court, while Xanthias improves his acquaintance with Æacus in the servants' hall, or whatever might be the equivalent in Pluto's establishment. The conversation between the two is highly confidential. "Your master seems quite the gentleman," says Æacus. "Oh! quite," says Xan-

thias"—he does nothing but game and drink." They find that life "below stairs" is very much the same in Tartarus as it is in the upper regions; and both agree that what they enjoy most is listening at the door, and discussing their masters' secrets with their own friends afterwards. While the two retainers are engaged in this interesting conversation, a noise outside attracts the new-comer's attention. "Oh," says Æacus, "it's only Æschylus and Euripides quarrelling. There's a tremendous rivalry going on just now among these dead people." He explains to his guest that special rank and precedence, with a seat at the royal table, is accorded in the Shades to the artist or professor who stands first in his own line. Æschylus had held the chair of tragedy until Euripides appeared below: but now this latter has made a party in his own favour—"chiefly of rogues and vagabonds"—and has laid claim to the chair. Æschylus has his friends among the respectable men; but respectable men are as scarce in the Shades—"as they are in this present company," observes Æacus, with a wave of his hand towards the audience.* So Pluto (who appears a very affable and good-humoured monarch) has determined that there shall be a public

* We find something of this professional *badinage* to the audience in Shakspeare's "Hamlet" (act v. sc. i.):—

Ham. Marry, why was he sent into England?

1*st Grave-d.* Why, because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or if he do not, 'tis no great matter there.

Ham. Why?

1*st Gr.* 'Twill not be seen in him there—there the men are as mad as he.

trial and discussion of their respective merits. Sophocles has put in no claim on his own behalf. The tribute which his brother dramatist here pays him is very graceful: "The first moment that he came, he went up straight to Æschylus and saluted him, and kissed his cheek, and took his hand quite kindly, and Æschylus edged a little from his seat, to give him room."

But—if Euripides is elected against Æschylus, Sophocles will challenge his right. The difficulty is to find competent judges. Æschylus has declined to leave the decision to the Athenians—he has no confidence in their honesty or their taste. [A bold stroke of personal satire, we might think, from a candidate for the dramatic crown of the festival, as against those whose verdict he was awaiting; the author was perhaps still smarting (as Brunck suggests) from the reception his "Clouds" had met with: but he knew his public—it was just the thing an Athenian audience would enjoy.] It had been already proposed to get Bacchus, as the great patron of the drama, to sit as judge in this controversy, so that his present visit has been most opportune; and whichever of the rival poets he places first, Pluto promises to allow his guest to take back to earth with him.

The contest between the rival dramatists takes place upon the stage, in full court, with Bacchus presiding, and the Chorus encouraging the competitors. It is extended to some length, but must have been full of interest to a play-loving audience, thoroughly familiar with the tragedies of both authors. Some of the points

we can even now quite appreciate. Æschylus, in the hands of Aristophanes, does not spare his competitor.

"A wretch that has corrupted everything—
Our music with his melodies from Crete,
Our morals with incestuous tragedies.
.
I wish the place of trial had been elsewhere—
I stand at disadvantage here.
Bac. As how?
Æs. Because my poems live on earth above,
And his died with him, and descended here,
And are at hand as ready witnesses."—(F.)

Euripides retorts upon his rival the use of "break-neck words, which it is not easy to find the meaning of"—a charge which some modern schoolboys would be quite ready to support. The two poets proceed, at the request of the arbitrator, each to recite passages from their tragedies for the other to criticise: and if we suppose, as we have every right to do, that the voice and gestures of some well-known popular tragedian were cleverly mimicked at the same time, we should then have an entertainment of a very similar kind to that which Foote and Matthews, and in later days Robson, afforded to an English audience by their remarkable imitations.

After various trials of skill, a huge pair of scales is produced, and the verses of each candidate are weighed, as a test of their comparative value. Still Bacchus cannot decide. At last he puts to each a political question—perhaps *the* question of the day—which has formed the subject of pointed allusion more than once in the course of the play.

Alcibiades, long the popular favourite, has recently been banished, and is now living privately in Thrace; —shall he be recalled? Both answer enigmatically; but the advice of the elder poet plainly tends to the policy of recall, which was no doubt the prevailing inclination of the Athenians. In vain does Euripides remind Bacchus that he had come there purposely to bring him back, and had pledged his word to do so. The god quotes against him a well-known verse from his own tragedy of 'Hippolytus,' with the sophistry of which his critics were never tired of taunting him—

It was my *tongue* that swore.

And Æschylus, crowned by his decision as the First of Tragedians, is led off in triumphal procession in the suite of the god of the drama, with Pluto's hearty approbation. He leaves his chair in the Shades to Sophocles,—with strict injunctions to keep Euripides out of it.

This very lively comedy, the humour of which is still so intelligible, seems to have supplied the original idea for those modern burlesques upon the Olympian and Tartarian deities which were at one time so popular. For some reason it was not brought out in the author's own name; but it gained the first prize, and was acted a second time, probably in the same year—an honour, strange to say, very unusual at Athens.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMEN'S FESTIVAL.—THE ECCLESIAZUSÆ.

THE 'Thesmophoriazusæ,' as this piece is called in the Greek, is a comedy in which, as in the 'Lysistrata,' the fair sex play the chief part, although its whole point lies in a satire (though scarcely so severe as that in 'The Frogs') upon Euripides, whom our author was never tired of holding up to ridicule. The secret history of this literary quarrel we shall never know; if indeed there was really any quarrel which could have a history, and if the unceasing jests which Aristophanes dealt out in this and other comedies against his brother dramatist were not mainly prompted by the fact that his tragedies were highly popular, universally known and quoted, and therefore an excellent subject for the caricature and parody which were the essence of this style of comedy. It has been remarked that the conservative principles of the comic author are supposed to have been scandalised by the new-fashioned ideas of the tragedian: but the shafts of his ridicule are directed much more frequently against the plots and

versification of Euripides's plays than against his philosophy.*

The 'Thesmophoria,' or great feast of Ceres and Proserpine, from which this comedy takes its name, was exclusively a women's festival, and none of the other sex were allowed to be present at its celebration. Euripides had the reputation among his contemporaries of being a woman-hater, and he had undoubtedly said bitter things of them in many of his tragedies.† But to those who remember his characters of Iphigenia, and Theonoe, and the incomparable Alcestis, the reproach may well seem much too general. However, in this comedy the women of Athens are supposed to have resolved upon his condign punishment; and at this next festival they are to sit in solemn conclave, to determine the mode in which it is to be carried out. Euripides has heard of it, and is in great dismay. He goes, in the opening scene, accompanied by his father-in-law Mnesilochus, to his friend and fellow-dramatist Agathon, to beg him to go to the festival disguised in woman's clothes, and there plead his cause for him. He would do it himself, but that he is so well known, and has such a huge rough beard, while Agathon is

* See, however, on this question, 'Euripides' (Anc. Cl.), p. 37, &c.

† Perhaps his most bitter words are those addressed to Phædra by Bellerophon, in the lost tragedy of that name,—

> "O thou most vile! thou—*woman!*—For what word
> That lips could frame could carry more reproach?"

But we must not forget Shakspeare's—"Frailty, thy name is woman!" or judge the poet too harshly by a passionate expression put into the mouth of one of his characters.

really very lady-like in appearance. In fact, he is used to the thing; for he always wears female attire when he has to write the female parts in his tragedies —it assists the imagination: as Richardson is said not to have felt equal to the composition of a letter to one of his lady-correspondents unless he sat down in full dress. Agathon contents himself, by way of reply, with asking his petitioner whether he ever wrote this line in a certain tragedy, in which a son requests his father to be so good as to suffer death in his stead—

Thou lovest thy life,—why not thy father too?

And when Euripides cannot deny the quotation from his 'Alcestis,' his friend recommends him not to expect other people to run risks to get *him* out of trouble.

Upon this, Mnesilochus takes pity upon his son-in-law, and consents to undertake the necessary disguise, though it will require very close shaving—an operation which Euripides immediately sets to work to perform upon the stage, while Agathon supplies him with the necessary garments. Euripides promises that, should his advocate get into any difficulties, he will do his best to extricate him by some of those subtle devices for which his tragedies are so celebrated. He offers to pledge himself by an oath to this effect; but Mnesilochus begs it may be a mental oath only—reminding him of that unfortunate line of his which we have already found Bacchus quoting against him in 'The Frogs'—

It was my tongue that swore, and not my mind.

The scene is changed to the temple of Ceres, where

the women hold solemn debate upon the crimes of the poet. He has vilely slandered the sex, and made them objects of ridicule and suspicion. One of their number puts in a claim of special damages against him; she had maintained herself and "five small children" by making wreaths for the temples, until this Euripides began to teach people that "there were no gods," and so ruined her trade. The disguised Mnesilochus rises to defend his relative. But the apology which the author puts into his mouth is conceived in the bitterest spirit of satire. He shows that the tragedian, far from having slandered the ladies, has really dealt with them most leniently. True, he has said some severe things of them, but nothing to what he *might* have said. And he proceeds to relate some very scurrilous anecdotes, to show that the sex is really much worse than the poet has represented it. He is repeatedly interrupted, in spite of his protests in behalf of that freedom of speech which is the admitted right of every Athenian woman. How was it, asks one of the audience, that Euripides never once took the good Penelope as the subject of a tragedy, when he was always so ready to paint characters like Helen and Phædra? Mnesilochus answers that it was because there are no wives like Penelope nowadays, but plenty of wives like Phædra.

His audience are naturally astonished and indignant at this unexpected attack from one of their own number. Who is this audacious woman, this traitress to her sex? No one knows her, of course: and it is whispered that there is a man among them in disguise.

There is a terrible uproar in the meeting, and the intruder, after a sharp cross-examination by a shrewish dame, is soon detected. To save himself from the vengeance of the exasperated women, he flies for refuge to the altar, snatching a baby from one of their number, and (like Dicæopolis in 'The Acharnians') * threatens to kill it at once unless they let him go. But the women who have no babies display a good deal of indifference to his threats, and vow they will burn him, then and there, whatever happens to the unfortunate hostage. Mnesilochus proceeds to strip it, when, lo! it turns out to be nothing more or less than a wine-skin in baby's clothes. He will cut its throat, nevertheless. The foster-mother is almost as much distressed as if it were a real child.

Woman. Hold, I beseech you! Never be so cruel!
Do what you will with me, but spare my darling.
Mnes. I know you love it—it's a woman's weakness—
But, none the less, its blood must flow to-day.
Wom. O my poor child!—Bring us a bowl, dear Mania!
If it must die, do let us catch its blood.
Mnes. Well—hold it under. I'll oblige you. (*Slits the wine-skin, and drinks off the contents.*) There!
And here's the skin of the victim—for the priestess.

Mnesilochus is detained in custody until the constables can be sent for. In this strait he naturally looks to Euripides, on whose account he has got into

* The "situation" seems to have been a favourite one. It may be remembered in Kotzebue's play, which Sheridan turned into 'Pizarro,' in the scene where Rolla carries off Cora's child.

trouble, to come and help him according to promise. And from this point the whole action of the piece becomes the broadest burlesque upon the tragedies of that author, which only an Athenian audience, to whom every scene and almost every line was familiar, could fully appreciate. Indeed no comedy of Aristophanes illustrates so strongly what the character of this audience was, and how, with all their love for coarseness and buffoonery, the poet saw in the masses who filled that vast amphitheatre a literary "public" the like of which was never seen before or since.

How then is the prisoner to communicate his situation to Euripides? He will do what that poet makes his own "Palamedes" do in the tragedy—write a message containing his sad story upon the oars, and throw them out. But there are no oars likely to be found in the temple. He substitutes some little images of the gods, which are at hand, and throws them off the stage—a double blow at the alleged profanity of the tragedian and at his far-fetched devices.

The interval is filled up by a song from the Chorus of Women, the first part of which is light and playful enough, and so thoroughly modern in its tone that it does not lose much in a free translation:—

They're always abusing the women,
As a terrible plague to men:
They say we're the root of all evil,
And repeat it again and again;
Of war, and quarrels, and bloodshed,
All mischief, be what it may:
And pray, then, why do you marry us,
If we're all the plagues you say?

And why do you take such care of us,
And keep us so safe at home,
And are never easy a moment,
If ever we chance to roam?
When you ought to be thanking heaven
That your Plague is out of the way—
You all keep fussing and fretting—
"Where *is* my Plague to-day?"
If a Plague peeps out of the window,
Up go the eyes of the men;
If she hides, then they all keep staring
Until she looks out again.

But Euripides, supposed (with a good deal of theatrical licence) to have been summoned by the message so oddly despatched, does not appear to his rescue. "It must be because he is so ashamed of his Palamedes," says Mnesilochus—"I'll try some device from another of his tragedies—I'll be Helen, that's his last—I've got the woman's dress on, all ready." And he proceeds to quote, from the tragedy of that name, her invocation to her husband Menelaus to come to her aid. This second appeal is successful; the poet enters, dressed in that character; and a long dialogue takes place between the two, partly in quotation and partly in parody of the words of the play,—to the considerable mystification of the assembled women. But it is in vain that the representative of Menelaus tries to take his Helen "back with him to Sparta." The police arrive, and Mnesilochus is put in the stocks. And there he remains, though various devices from other tragedies, which give occasion for abundant parody, are tried to rescue him: forming a scene which, supposing

again that the peculiar style of well-known actors was cleverly imitated, must lose nearly all its humour when read instead of being heard and seen. But the Athenian police show themselves as insensible to theatrical appeals and poetic quotations as their London representatives would probably be. At last Euripides offers terms of peace to the offended ladies: he will never abuse them in future, if they will only let his friend off now. They agree, so far as they are concerned; but the prisoner is now in the hands of the law, and Euripides must deal with the law's representatives for his release. It is effected by the commonplace expedient of bribing the constable on duty; and so the burlesque ends,—somewhat feebly, according to our modern requirements.

THE ECCLESIAZUSÆ.

"The Female Parliament," as the name of this comedy may be freely rendered, was not produced until nineteen years after the play last noticed, but may be classed with it as being also in great measure levelled against the sex. It is a broad but very amusing satire upon those ideal republics, founded upon communistic principles, of which Plato's well-known treatise is the best example. His 'Republic' had been written, and probably delivered in the form of oral lectures at Athens, only two or three years before, and had no doubt excited a considerable sensation. But many of its most startling principles had long ago been ventilated in the Schools; and their authorship has been

commonly attributed, as was also the art of "making the worse cause appear the better," with very much besides of the sophistical teaching of the day, to Protagoras of Abdera.

The women have determined, under the leadership of a clever lady named Praxagora, to reform the constitution of Athens. For this purpose they will dress like men—beards included—and occupy the seats in the Pnyx, so as to be able to command a majority of votes in the next public Assembly, the parliament of Athens. Praxagora is strongly of opinion, with the modern Mrs Poyser, that on the point of speaking, at all events, the women have great natural advantages over the men; that "when they have anything to say, they can mostly find words to say it in." They hold a midnight meeting for the purpose of rehearsing their intended speeches, and getting accustomed to their new clothes. Two or three of the most ambitious orators unfortunately break down at the very outset, much to their leader's disgust, by addressing the Assembly as "ladies," and swearing female oaths, and using many other unparliamentary expressions quite unbefitting their masculine attire. Praxagora herself, however, makes a speech which is very generally admired. She complains of the mismanagement hitherto of public affairs, and asserts that the only hope of salvation for the state is to put the government into the hands of the women; arguing, like Lysistrata in the other comedy, that those who have so long managed the domestic establishment successfully are best fitted to undertake the same duties on a larger scale. The women, too, are shown

by their advocate to be highly conservative, and therefore safe guardians of the public interests :—

> They roast and boil after the good old fashion,
> They keep the holidays that were kept of old,
> They make their cheesecakes by the old receipts,
> They keep a private bottle, like their mothers,
> They plague their husbands—as they always did.

Even in the management of a campaign, they will be found more prudent and more competent than the men :—

> Being mothers, they'll be chary of the blood
> Of their own sons, our soldiers ; being mothers,
> They will take care their children do not starve
> When they're on service ; and, for ways and means,
> Trust us, there's nothing cleverer than a woman.
> And as for diplomacy, they'll be hard indeed
> To cheat—they know too many tricks themselves.

Her speech is unanimously applauded; she is elected lady-president on the spot, by public acclamation, and the Chorus of ladies march off towards the Pnyx to secure their places, like the old gentleman in 'The Wasps,' ready for daybreak.

In the next scene, two of the husbands enter in great perplexity, one wrapped in his wife's dressing-gown, and the other with only his under-garment on, and without his shoes. They both want to go to the Assembly, but cannot find their clothes. While they are wondering what in the world their wives can have done with them, and what is become of the ladies themselves, a third neighbour, Chremes, comes in. He has

been to the Assembly; but even he was too late to get the threepence which was allowed out of the public treasury to all who took their seat in good time, and which all Athenian citizens, if we may trust their satirist, were so ludicrously eager to secure. The place was quite full already, and of strange faces too. And a handsome fair-faced youth (Praxagora in disguise, we are to understand) had got up, and amid the loud cheers of those unknown voters had proposed and carried a resolution, that the government of the state should be placed in the hands of a committee of ladies,—an experiment which had found favour also with others, chiefly because it was "the only change which had not as yet been tried at Athens." His two neighbours are somewhat confounded at his news, but congratulate themselves on the fact that the wives will now, at all events, have to see to the maintenance of the children, and that "the gods sometimes bring good out of evil."

The women return, and get home as quickly as they can to change their costume, so that the trick by which the passing of this new decree has been secured may not be detected. Praxagora succeeds in persuading her husband that she had been sent for in a hurry to attend a sick neighbour, and only borrowed his coat to put on "because the night was so cold," and his strong shoes and staff, in order that any evil-disposed person might take her for a man as she tramped along, and so not interfere with her. She at first affects not to have heard of the reform which has been just carried, but when her husband explains it, declares it will make Athens a paradise. Then she confesses to him that

she has herself been chosen, in full assembly, "Generalissima of the state." She puts the question, however, just as we have all seen it put by a modern actress, — "Will this house agree to it?" And if Praxagora was at all attractively got up, we may be sure it was carried by acclamation in the affirmative. Then, in the first place, there shall be no more poverty; there shall be community of goods, and so there shall be no lawsuits, and no gambling, and no informers. Moreover, there shall be community of wives,—and all the ugly women shall have the first choice of husbands. So she goes off to her public duties, to see that these resolutions are carried out forthwith; the good citizen begging leave to follow close at her side, so that all who see him may say, "What a fine fellow is our Generalissima's husband!"

The scene changes to another street in Athens, where the citizens are bringing out all their property, to be carried into the market-place and inventoried for the common stock. Citizen A. dances with delight as he marshals his dilapidated chattels into a mock procession—from the meal-sieve, which he kisses, it looks so pretty with its powdered hair, to the iron pot which looks as black "as if Lysimachus" (some well-known fop of the day, possibly present among the audience) "had been boiling his hair-dye in it." This patriot, at least, has not much to lose, and hopes he may have something to gain, under these female communists. But his neighbour, who is better off, is in no such hurry. The Athenians, as he remarks, are always making new laws and abrogating them; what has been passed

to-day very likely will be repealed to-morrow. Besides, it is a good old national habit to *take*, not to *give*. He will wait a while before he gives in any inventory of his possessions.

But at this point comes the city-beadle (an appointment now held, of course, by a lady) with a summons to a banquet provided for all citizens out of the public funds: and amongst the items in the bill of fare is one dish whose name is composed of seventy-seven syllables —which Aristophanes gives us, but which the reader shall be spared. Citizen B. at once delivers it as his opinion that "every man of proper feeling should support the constitution to the utmost of his ability," and hurries to take his place at the feast. There are some difficulties caused, very naturally, by the new communistic regulations as to providing for the old and ugly women, but with these we need not deal. The piece ends with an invitation, issued by direction of Praxagora through her lady-chamberlain, to the public generally, spectators included, to join the national banquet which is to inaugurate the new order of things. The "tag," as we should call it in our modern theatrical slang, spoken from what in a Greek theatre was equivalent to the footlights in a London one, by the leader of the Chorus of ladies, neatly requests, on the author's behalf, the favourable decision of judges and spectators:—

> One little hint to our good critics here
> I humbly offer; to the wise among you,
> Remember the wise lessons of our play,
> And choose me for my wisdom. You, again,

Who love to laugh, think of our merry jests,
And choose me for my wit. And so, an't please you,
I bid you all to choose me for the crown.
And let not this be counted to my loss—
That 'twas my lot to be presented first:
But judge me by my merits, and your oaths;
And do not take those vile coquettes for tutors,
Who keep their best smiles for their latest suitors.

It is plain from the whole character of this play, as well as from the 'Lysistrata' and the 'Women's Festival,' that whatever reason the Athenian women might have had for complaining of their treatment at the hands of Euripides, they had little cause to congratulate themselves upon such an ally as Aristophanes. The whip of the tragic poet was as balm compared with the scorpions of the satirist. But it must be borne in mind, in estimating these unsparing jests upon the sex which we find in his comedies, as well as the coarseness which too often disfigures them — though it is but a poor apology for either—that it is very doubtful whether it was the habit for women to attend the dramatic performances. Their presence was certainly exceptional, and confined probably under any circumstances to the less public festivals, and to the exhibitions of tragedy. But women had few acknowledged rights among the polished Athenians. They laughed to scorn the notion of the ruder but more chivalric Spartan, who saluted his wife as his "lady," and their great philosopher Aristotle reproached the nation who could use such a term as being no better than "women-servers." These "women's rights" have

been a fertile source of jest and satire in all times, our own included; but there is a wide interval in tone and feeling between the Athenian poet's Choruses of women, and the graceful picture, satire though it be, drawn by the English Laureate, of the

"Six hundred maidens clad in purest white
Before two streams of light from wall to wall."

* Tennyson's 'Princess.'

CHAPTER IX.

PLUTUS.

THE comedy which takes its name from the god of riches is a lively satire on the avarice and corruption which was a notorious feature of Athenian society, as it has been of other states, modern as well as ancient, when luxury and self-indulgence have created those artificial wants which are the danger of civilisation. The literal points of the satire are, of course, distinctly Athenian; but the moral is of no exclusive date or locality.

Chremylus—a country gentleman, or rather yeoman, living somewhere close to the city of Athens—has found, in his experience of life, that mere virtue and honesty are *not* the best policy; at any rate, not the policy which pays. He has made a visit, therefore, to the oracle of Apollo, to consult that authority as to how he shall bring up his only son; whether he shall train him in the honest and simple courses which were those of his forefathers, or have him initiated in the wicked but more profitable ways of the world, as the world is now. He is, in fact, the Strepsiades of

'The Clouds,' only that he is a more unwilling disciple in the new school of unrighteousness. The answer given him by the god is, that he must accost the first person he meets on quitting the temple, and persuade or compel him to accompany him home to his house.

Chremylus appears on the stage accompanied by his slave Cario,—a clever rascal, the earliest classical type which has come down to us of the Davus with whom we become so familiar in Roman comedy, and the Leporello and Scapin, and their numerous progeny of lying valets and sharp servants, impudent but useful, who occupy the modern stage. They have encountered the stranger, and are following him; he is in rags, and he turns out to be blind. With some difficulty, and not without threats of beating, they get him to disclose his name: it is Plutus, the god of wealth himself. But how, then, in the name of wonder, does he appear in this wretched plight? He has just escaped, he tells them, from the house of a miser (who is satirised by name, with all the liberty of a satirist to whom actions for libel were unknown), where he has had a miserable time of it. And how, they ask, came he to be blind?

Pl. Jove wrought me this, out of ill-will to men.
For in my younger days I threatened still
I would betake me to the good and wise
And upright only; so he made me blind,
That I should not discern them from the knaves.
Such grudge bears he to worth and honesty.
Chr. Yet surely 'tis the worthy and the honest
Alone who pay him sacrifice?
Pl. I know 'tis so.

Chr. Go to, now, friend: suppose you had your sight
As heretofore—say, wouldst thenceforth avoid
All knaves and rascals?
Pl. Yea, I swear I would.
Chr. And seek the honest?
Pl. Ay, and gladly too,
For 'tis a long time since I saw their faces.
Chr. No marvel—I have eyes, and cannot see them.

Plutus is very unwilling to accompany his new friend home, though Chremylus assures him that he is a man of unusual probity. "All men say that," is the god's reply; "but the moment they get hold of *me*, their probity goes to the winds." Besides, he is afraid of Jove. Chremylus cries out against him for a coward. Would the sovereignty of Jove be worth three farthings' purchase, but for him? What do men offer prayer and sacrifice to Jove himself for, but for money? Money is the true ruler, alike of gods and men. "I myself," puts in Cario, "should not now be another gentleman's property, as I am, but for the fact of my master here having a little more money than I had." All arts and handicrafts, all inventions good or evil, have this one source—both master and man (for Cario is very forward in giving his opinion) agree in protesting; while the god listens to what he declares is, to his simpler mind, a new revelation:—

Car. Is't not your fault the Persian grows so proud?
Chr. Do not men go to Parliament through you?
Car. Who swells the navy estimates, but you?
Chr. Who subsidises foreigners, but you?
Car. For want of you our friend there goes to jail.

Chr. Why are bad novels written, but for you?
Car. That league with Egypt, was it not through you?
Chr. And Lais loves that lout—and all for you!
Car. And our new admiral's tower—
Chr. (*impatiently to Cario*). May fall, I trust,
Upon your noisy head!—But in brief, my friend,
Are not all things that are done done for you?
For, good or bad, you are alone the cause.
Ay, and in war, that side is safe to win
Into whose scale you throw the golden weight.
Pl. Am I indeed so potent as all this?
Chr. Yea, by great heaven, and very much more than this,
Since none hath ever had his fill of you:
Of all things else there comes satiety;
We tire of Love—
Car. Of loaves—
Chr. Of music—
Car. Sweetmeats—
Chr. Of honour—
Car. Cheesecakes—
Chr. Valour—
Car. Of dried figs—
Chr. Ambition—
Car. Biscuit—
Chr. High command—
Car. Pea-soup.
Chr. Of you alone is no man filled too full.

Still Plutus follows his guides unwillingly. His experiences as the guest of men have not hitherto been pleasant:—

Pl. If I perchance took lodging with a miser,
He digs me a hole i' the earth, and buries me;
And if some honest friend shall come to him,
And ask the loan of me, by way of help,

He swears him out he never saw my face.
Or, if I quarter with your man of pleasure,
He wastes me on his dice and courtesans,
And forthwith turns me naked on the street.
Chr. Because you never had the luck, as yet,
To light upon a moderate man—like me.
I love economy, look ye—no man more;
Then again, I know how to spend, in season.
But let's indoors: I long to introduce
My wife, and only son, whom I do love
Best in this world—next to yourself, I should say.

So Plutus goes home with his new host, and Cario is forthwith sent to call together the friends and acquaintances of his master from the neighbouring farms to rejoice with them at the arrival of this blessed guest. These form the Chorus of the comedy. They enter with dance and song, and are welcomed heartily by Chremylus, with some apology for taking them away from their business,—but the occasion is exceptional. They protest against any apology being required. If they can bear the crush and wrangle of the law-courts, day after day, for their poor dole of threepence as jurymen, they are not going to let Plutus slip through their hands for a trifle. Following more leisurely in the rear of the common rush,—perhaps as a person of more importance,—comes in a neighbour, Blepsidemus, whose name and character is something equivalent to that of "Mr Facing-both-ways" in Bunyan's allegory. He has heard that Chremylus has become suddenly rich, and is most of all surprised that in such an event he should think of sending for his old friends,—a very unusual proceeding, as he observes,

in modern society. Chremylus, however, informs his friend that the report is true; at least, that he is in a fair way to become rich, but that there is, as yet, some little risk in the matter:—

> If all go right, I'm a made man for ever;
> But,—if we slip—we're ruined past redemption.

Blepsidemus thinks he sees the state of the case. This sudden wealth, this fear of possible disaster,—the man has robbed a temple, or something of that kind, it is evident; and he tells him so. In vain does Chremylus protest his innocence. Blepsidemus will not believe him, and regards him with pious horror:—

Alack! that in this world there is no honesty,
But every man is a mere slave to pelf!
Chr. Heaven help the man!—has he gone mad on a sudden?
Bl. (*looking at Chremylus, and half aside*). What a sad change from his old honest ways!
Chr. You've lost your wits, sirrah, by all that's good!
Bl. And his eyes quail—he dares not meet my look—
For damning guilt stands written in his face!
Chr. Ha! now I see! you take me for a thief,
And would go shares, then, would ye?
Bl. (*eagerly*). Shares? in what?
Chr. Stuff! don't be a fool! 'tis quite another matter.
Bl. (*in a whisper*). Not a mere larceny then, but—robbery?
Chr. (*getting angry*). I say, no.
Bl. (*confidentially*). Hark ye, old friend—for a mere trifle, look you,
I'll undertake, before this gets abroad,
To hush it up,—I'll bribe the prosecutors.

Chremylus has great difficulty in making his con-

scientious friend understand the real position—that he has Wealth in person come to be his guest, and means to keep him, if possible. But the god is blind at present, and the first thing to be done is to get him restored to sight. "Blind! is he really?" says Blepsidemus; "then no wonder he never found his way to my house!" They agree that the best means to effect a cure is to make him pass the night in the temple of Æsculapius; and this they are proceeding to arrange, when they are interrupted by the appearance of a very ill-looking lady. It is Poverty, who comes to put a stop, if it may be, to a revolution which threatens to banish her altogether from Athens. Chremylus fails to recognise her, in spite of a long practical acquaintanceship. Blepsidemus at first thinks she must be one of the Furies out of the tragedy repertory, by her grim visage and squalid habit. But the moment he learns who his friend's visitor really is, he takes to flight at once—as is the way of the world—scared at her very appearance. He is persuaded, however, to return and listen to what the goddess has to say. She proceeds to explain the great mistake that will be made for the true interest of the citizens, if she be really banished from the city. For she it is who is their real benefactor, as she assures them, and not Wealth. All the real blessings of mankind come from the hand of Poverty. This Chremylus will by no means admit. It is possible that Wealth may have done some harm heretofore by inadvertence; but if this blessed guest can once recover his sight, then will he for the future visit only the upright and the virtu-

ous; and so will all men—as soon as virtue and honesty become the only introduction to Wealth—be very sure to practise them. Poverty continues to argue the point in the presence of the Chorus of rustic neighbours, who now come on the stage, and naturally take a very warm interest in the question. She contends that were it not for the stimulus which she continually applies, the work of the world would stand still. No man would learn or exercise any trade or calling. There would be neither smith, nor shipwright, nor tailor, nor shoemaker, nor wheelwright—nay, there would be none either to plough or sow, if all alike were rich. "Nonsense," interposes Chremylus, "the slaves would do it." But there would be no slaves, the goddess reminds him, if there were no Poverty. It is Wealth, on the other hand, that gives men the gout, makes them corpulent and thick-legged, wheezy and pursy; "while I," says Poverty, "make them strong and wiry, with waists like wasps—ay, and with stings for their enemies." "Look at your popular leaders" (for the satirist never spares the demagogues)—"so long as they continue poor, they are honest enough; but when once they have grown rich at the public expense, they betray the public interest." Chremylus confesses that here, at least, she speaks no more than the truth. But if such are the advantages which Poverty brings, he has a very natural question to ask—

> How comes it then that all men flee thy face?
> *Pov.* Because I make men better.

But her pleading is in vain. "Away with your

rhetoric," says Chremylus; "our ears are deaf to all such arguments." He uses almost the very words of Sir Hudibras—

> "He who complies against his will,
> Is of his own opinion still." *

And an unanimous sentence of expulsion is passed against the unpopular deity, while Plutus is sent, under the escort of Cario, with bed and bedding, to take up his quarters for the night in the temple of Æsculapius, there to invoke the healing power which can restore his sight.

An interval of time unusually long for the Athenian drama is supposed to elapse between this and what we may call the second act of the comedy—the break in the action having been most probably marked by a chant from the Chorus, which has not, however, come down to us in the manuscripts. The scene reopens with the return of Cario from the temple on the morning following.

The resort to Æsculapius has been entirely successful. But Aristophanes does not miss the opportunity of sharp satire upon the gross materialities of the popular creed and the tricks of priestcraft. Cario informs his mistress and the Chorus, who come to inquire the result, that the god has performed the cure in person—going round the beds of the patients, who lay there awaiting his visit, for all the world like a modern hospital surgeon, making his diagnosis of each

* "I'll not be convinced, even if you convince me," are his words.

case, with an assistant following him with pestle and mortar and portable medicine-chest. Plutus had been cured almost instantaneously—quicker, as the narrator impudently tells his mistress, than she could toss off half-a-dozen glasses of wine. But one Neoclides, who had come there on the same errand (though, blind as he was, observes Cario, not the sharpest-sighted of them all could match him in stealing), fares very differently at the hands of the god of medicine; for Æsculapius applies to his eyes a lotion of garlic and vinegar, which makes him roar with pain, and leaves him blinder than ever. Another secret of the temple, too, the cunning varlet has seen, while he was pretending to be asleep like the rest. He saw the priests go round quietly, after the lamps were put out, and eat all the cakes and fruit brought by the patients as offerings to the god. He took the liberty, he says—"thinking it must be a very holy practice"—of following their example, and so got possession of a pudding which an old lady, one of the patients, had placed carefully by her bedside for her supper, and on which he had set his heart when first he saw it. His mistress is shocked at such profanity.

> Unhallowed varlet! didst not fear the god?
> *Cario.* Marry did I, and sorely—lest his godship
> Should get the start of me, and grab the dish.
> But the old lady, when she heard me coming,
> Put her hand out; and so I gave a hiss,
> And bit her gently; 'twas the Holy Snake,
> She thought, and pulled her hand in, and lay still.

But the mistress of the house is too delighted with

the good news which Cario has brought to chide him very severely for his irreverence. She orders her maids at once to prepare a banquet for the return of this blessed guest, who presently reappears, attended by Chremylus and a troop of friends. Plutus salutes his new home in a burlesque of the high vein of tragedy :—

All hail! thou first, O bright and blessed sun,
And thou, fair plain, where awful Pallas dwells,
And this Cecropian land, henceforth mine home!
I blush to mind me of my past estate—
Of the vile herd with whom I long consorted;
While those who had been worthy of my friendship
I, poor blind wretch! unwittingly passed by.
But now the wrong I did will I undo,
And show henceforth to all mankind, that sore
Against my will I kept bad company.

[Enter Chremylus, surrounded and followed by a crowd of congratulating friends, whom he thrusts aside right and left.]

Chr. To the devil with you all—d'ye hear, good people!
Why, what a plague friends are on these occasions!
One hatches them in swarms, when one gets money.
They nudge my sides, and pat me on the back,
And smother me with tokens of affection;
Men bow to me I never saw before;
And all the pompous dawdlers in the Square
Find me the very centre of attraction!

Even his wife is unusually affectionate; and the welcome guest is ushered into the house with choral dance and song—highly burlesque, no doubt; but both are lost to us, and such losses are not always to be regretted.

The scene which follows introduces Cario in a state of great contentment with the new order of things. It is possible that, as in 'The Knights,' there was an entire change of scenery as well as of dresses at this point of the performance; that the ancient country grange has been transmuted into a grand modern mansion, with all the appliances of wealth and luxury. At all events, Cario (who from a rustic slave has now become quite a "gentleman's gentleman") informs the Chorus, who listen to him open-mouthed, that such has been the result of entertaining Plutus.

Cario (*stroking himself*). Oh what a blessed thing, good friends, is riches!
And with no toil or trouble of our own!
Lo, there is store of all good things within,
Yea, heaped upon us—yet we've cheated no one!
Our meal-chest's brimming with the finest boltings,
The cellar's stocked with wine—of such a bouquet!
And every pot and pan in the house is heaped
With gold and silver—it's a sight to see!
The well runs oil—the very mustard-pot
Has nothing but myrrh in it, and you can't get up
Into the garret, it's so full of figs.
The crockery's bronze, the wooden bowls are silver,
And the oven's made of ivory. In the kitchen,
We play at pitch-and-toss with golden pieces;
And scent ourselves (so delicate are we grown) with—garlic.*

* This is a good instance of those jokes "contrary to expectation'" (as the Greek term has it) which are very common in these comedies, but which can very seldom be reproduced, for more reasons than one, in an English version. Of course the audience were led to expect something more fragrant than "garlic." We are accustomed to something of the same kind in the puns which frequently conclude a line in our modern

As to my master, he's within there, sacrificing
A hog and a goat and a ram, full drest, good soul!
But the smoke drove me out—(*affectedly*)—I can*not* stand it.
I'm rather sensitive, and smoke hurts my eyelids.

The happy results of the new administration are further shown in the cases of some other characters who now come upon the scene. An Honest Man, who has spent his fortune on his friends and met with nothing but ingratitude in return, now finds his wealth suddenly restored to him, and comes to dedicate to the god who has been his benefactor the threadbare cloak and worn-out shoes which he had been lately reduced to wear. A public Informer—that hateful character whom the comic dramatist was never tired of holding up to the execration of his audience—has now found his business fail him, and threatens that, if there be any law or justice left in Athens, this god who leaves the poor knaves to starve shall be made blind again. Cario—quite in the spirit of the clown in a modern pantomime—strips him of his fine clothes, puts the honest man's ragged cloak on him instead, hangs the old shoes round his neck, and kicks him off the stage, howling out that he will surely "lay an information." An old lady who has lost her young lover, as soon as under the new dispensation she lost the charms of her money, in vain appeals to Chremylus, as having influence with this reformed government, to obtain her some

burlesques. In neither case, perhaps, is the wit of the highest order.

Mr Walsh, in the preface to his 'Aristophanes' (p. viii), illustrates not inaptly this style of jest by a comparison with Goldsmith's "Elegy on the Glory of her sex, Mrs Mary Blaize.'

measure of justice. Not only the world of men, but the world of gods, is out of joint. In the last scene, Mercury knocks at the door of Chremylus. He has brought a terrible message from Jupiter. He orders Cario to bring out the whole family—"master, mistress, children, slaves—and the dog—and himself—and the pig," and the rest of the brutes, that they may all be thrown together into the Barathrum—the punishment inflicted on malefactors of the deepest dye. Cario answers the Olympian messenger with a courtesy as scant as his own; under the new *régime*, he and his master are become very independent of Jupiter. "You'd be none the worse for a slice off your tongue, young fellow," says the mortal servant to him of Olympus; "why, what's the matter?" "Matter enough," answers Mercury:—

Why, ye have wrought the very vilest deed;
Since Plutus yonder got his sight again,
No man doth offer frankincense or bays,
Or honey-cake or victim or aught else,
To us poor gods.
Car. Nay, nor will offer, now;
Ye took poor care of us when we *were* pious.
Mer. As for the other gods, I care not much;
But 'tis myself I pity.
Car. You're right there.
Mer. Why, in the good old times, from every shop
I got good things,—rich wine-cakes, honey, figs,
Fit for a god like Mercury to eat;
But now I lie and sleep to cheat my hunger.
Car. It serves you right; you never did much good.
Mer. Oh for those noble cheesecakes, rich and brown!
Car. 'Tis no use calling—cheesecakes an't in season.

Mer. O those brave gammons that I once enjoyed!
Car. Don't gammon me—be off with you to—heaven!

Mercury begs him at last, for old acquaintance' sake, and in remembrance of the many little scrapes which his pilfering propensities would have brought him into with his master, but that he, the god of craft, helped him out of them,—to have a little fellow-feeling for a servant out of place and thrown upon his own finding. Is there no place for him in Chremylus's household? What? says Cario; would he leave Olympus and take service with mortals? Certainly he would—the living and the perquisites are so much better. Would he turn deserter? asks the other (deserter being a word of abomination to Greek ears). The god replies in words which seem to be a quotation or a parody from some of the tragic poets—

That soil is fatherland which feeds us best.

The dialogue which follows is an amusing play upon the various offices assigned to Mercury, who was a veritable Jack-of-all-trades in the popular theology. The humour is very much lost in any English version, however free:—

Car. What place would suit you, now, suppose we hired you?
Mer. I'll turn my hand to anything you please;
You know I'm called the "Turner."
Car. Yes, but now
Luck's on our side, we want no turns at present.
Mer. I'll make your bargains for you.
Car. Thankye, no—
we've grown rich, we don't much care for bargains.

Mer. But I can cheat—
Car. On no account—for shame!
We well-to-do folks all go in for honesty.
Mer. Let me be Guide, then.
Car. Nay, our godship here
Has got his sight again, and needs no guiding.
Mer. Well, Master of the revels? don't say no—
Wealth must have pleasures,—music, and all that.
Car. (*ironically turning to the audience*). Why, what a lucky thing it is to be Jack-of-all-trades!
Here's a young man, now, who's sure to make a living!
(*To Mercury.*) Well—go and wash these tripes,—be quick—let's see
What sort of training servants get in heaven.

If the gods are suffering from this social revolution in the world below, still more lamentable are its effects upon the staff of officials maintained in their temples. The priest of Jupiter the Protector—one of the most important ecclesiastical functionaries in Athens—enters in great distress.

Priest. Be good enough to tell me, where is Chremylus?
Chr. (*coming out*). What is it, my good sir?
Priest. What is it?—ruin!
Why, since this Plutus has begun to see,
I'm dying of starvation. Positively,
I haven't a crust to eat! I, my dear sir,
The Priest of the Protector! think of that!
Chr. Dear me! and what's the reason, may I ask?
Priest. Why, because everybody now is rich:
Before, if times *were* bad, there still would come
Some merchant-captain home from time to time,
And bring us thank-offerings for escape from wreck;
Some lucky rogue, perhaps, who had got a verdict;
Or some good man held a family sacrifice,

And asked the priest, of course. But now no soul
Pays either vows or sacrifice, or comes
To the temple—save to shoot their rubbish there.
Car. (*half aside*). You take your tithe of that, I warrant me.

Chremylus, whose good fortune in entertaining such a desirable guest has put him into good-humour with all the world, comforts the despairing official. The true Father Protector—the deity whom all men acknowledge—is here, he tells him, in the house. They mean to set him up permanently at Athens, in his proper place—the Public Treasury. And he shall be the minister of the new worship, if he likes to quit the service of Jupiter. The priest gladly consents, and an extempore procession is at once formed upon the stage, into which the old lady who has lost her lover is pressed, and persuaded to carry a slop-pail upon her head, to represent the maidens who, on such occasions, bore the lustral waters for the inauguration. Cario and the Chorus bring up the rear in an antic dance, and they proceed to establish at Athens, with all due formalities, the worship of Wealth alone.

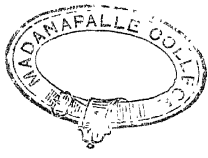
This play, as we now have it (for it had been brought out in a different form twenty years before), shows evident signs of a transition in the character of Athenian comedy. It is less extravagant, and more domestic, and so far approaches more nearly to what is called the "New" Comedy, of which we know little except from a few fragmentary remains and from its Roman adapters, but of which our modern drama is the result. Possibly, now that the great war was over,

and the spirit, as well as the power of Athens was somewhat broken, Aristophanes no longer felt that deep personal interest in politics which has left such a mark on all his earlier pieces. Another reason for the change, independent of the public taste, seems to have been the growing parsimony in the expenditure of public money on such performances. Critics have detected, in the character of the Chorus of 'The Ecclesiazusæ,' exhibited five years previously, in which the masks and dresses for a body of old women could have involved but little expense in comparison with the elaborate mounting of such plays as 'The Birds' and 'Wasps,' an accommodation to this new spirit of economy; and the same remark has been made as to the poverty of the musical portion of the play. The same may be said of the Chorus of rustics in this latter drama. 'Plutus' was the last comedy put upon the stage by Aristophanes himself, though two pieces which he had composed, of which we know little more than the titles, were exhibited in his name, after his death, by his son. They appear to have approached still more nearly, in their plot and general character, to our modern notions of a comedy than even 'Plutus.' Whether the author made any important alterations in this second edition of the play is not known; but in its present state, the piece seems to want something of his old dash and vigour. He was getting an old man; and probably some young aspirants to dramatic fame remarked upon his failing powers in somewhat the same terms as those in which, thirty-seven years before, he had spoken of his elder rival Cratinus—

"The keys work loose, the strings are slack, the melodies a jar." *

If so, Aristophanes never challenged and won the dramatic crown again, as Cratinus had done, to confound his younger critics. The curtain was soon about to fall for him altogether. He died a year or two afterwards.

* The Knights, l. 532.



END OF ARISTOPHANES.

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